

**18/10/2014**

# **Essex victim's perspective support for victims services**

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# Summary

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# 1 Background

The Essex Police and Crime Commissioner Police and Crime Plan outlined eight key priorities for 2013/14;

- Ensuring local solutions meet local problems
- Reducing domestic abuse
- **Supporting victims of crime**
- Reducing youth offending and all types of re-offending
- Tackling the consequences of alcohol and drug abuse and mental health issues
- Improving road safety
- Improving crime prevention
- Increasing efficiency in policing through collaborative working and innovation

Outlining that the victim and their needs would be at the centre of the Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC) plan.

Ipsos MORI were commissioned to engage a range of victims of crime in Essex to learn about their experiences as victims of crime.

The purpose of the project was to ensure that, as responsibility for commissioning local support for victim services changes from the Ministry of Justice to local PCCs, that the support services commissioned has the views of victims at its core.

The Victims Code ensures victims receive support to help them cope, recover and be protected from re-victimisation. This research provided an opportunity to give victims the opportunity to help design services that meet their needs.

## 1.1 Research Aims

The key aims of the research were to;

- Identify the range of victim needs
- Understand accessibility to victims' services within Essex
- Gauge the perceived experience and interaction of victim with victim services

- Map when victims need support and their requirements over time
- Understand what victim services would ideally look like to a range of victims

## 1.2

### 1.3 Methodology

Ipsos MORI conducted 60 qualitative interviews with victims of crime across Essex between the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014 and 15<sup>th</sup> September 2014.

- Victims had experienced a range of crimes from burglary, theft, murder, domestic abuse and rape
- Respondents were interviewed either face to face or over the phone.
- Two distinct groups of victims were included in the study; those who had reported their crime to the police and those who had not

**Table 1.1 – Table of crime types experienced by victims participating in the research**

	Interviews
<b>Attempted burglary/ Burglary/Theft/Robbery</b>	28
<b>Indecent Assault/ Sexual Assault/Rape</b>	15
<b>Domestic Violence</b>	10
<b>Murder</b>	4
<b>Assault</b>	2
<b>Stalking</b>	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	60

### 1.4 Interpreting qualitative data

Unlike quantitative surveys, qualitative research is not designed to provide statistically reliable data on what victims as a whole are thinking. It is illustrative rather than statistically reliable, and therefore does not allow conclusions to be drawn about the extent to which views are held, particularly the relative support for the different options among the population of victims of crime in Essex as a whole. Qualitative research is

intended to shed light on why people have particular views and how these views relate to, and, in turn are driven by demographic characteristics and the experiences of victims of crime in Essex concerned.

Verbatim comments from the interviews have been included within this report. These should not be interpreted as defining the views of the entire discussion as a whole, but have been selected to provide an insight into a particular body of opinion.

## 2 Key findings

Priorities for a support service for victims were that it be *local, personal* and *thorough*.

Higher frequency crime types such as *burglary and theft* often have a relatively short-term emotional effect on victims; up to six months after the incident. Calls from Victim Support are often received with surprise as victims of higher frequency crimes typically associated support as applicable to victims of more serious crimes only, but are well-received as it is reassuring for victims. As such these victims typically felt that the service experience that they received either *matched or exceeded their expectations*.

Victims of more serious offences, such as *sexual assault and murder* often had a range of very intense and long-term needs, given the effect the incidents had on them. Furthermore the needs of these victims changed over time. Although mainly positive about the support they receive eventually, *the process of receiving support is often complicated and provision is felt to be inconsistent*.

There is some *confusion around the referral process for support services*, especially amongst victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault. Victims not following a criminal justice system route often felt as if they had not been given the same level of support as someone formally engaged in the justice system.

Victim's *friends and family are a key source of support for most victims*, especially those experiencing lower level crimes. For the more serious crime types, whilst friends and family also provide core support, they themselves are also seriously affected by the crime and in turn would benefit from support too.

Although victims gained support at the beginning of the life cycle of the crime many felt that *as the process went on they were not supported throughout it all*. For example at the end of the court proceedings or on the anniversary of the crime; a time when victims of more serious crimes were often feeling particularly emotional and prone to reliving past trauma.

Victims see the police as a key individual to liaise with. As they are usually the first point of contact *sensitivity, care and consideration by the police is a necessity*.

If requested *Victim Support should be liaising and co-ordinating the support for the victim and the providers*. Knowledge of these support centres is important. It is vital for the victim that they are provided with the most convenient (in terms of location) and specialist (in terms of their needs) organisations possible. It was felt that Victim Support should act as a comprehensive directory for all relevant and local services.

Victims may have *multiple care needs* and support services should be ensuring all are met.



# 3 Experiences of being a victim

Chapter 3 outlines the typical experience of victims of crime across two groups of varying degrees of frequency and severity of crime. Case study examples are used to exemplify the sorts of experiences discussed within interviews.

## Key findings

Experiences often varied by crime type. Higher frequency crime types such as burglary and theft often have a relatively short-term emotional effect on victims; up to six months after the incident. Calls from Victim Support are often an unexpected surprise as victims of lower level crimes typically associated support as applicable to victims of more serious crimes. They are nevertheless well-received as they provide reassurance for victims. As such these victims typically felt that the service experience that they received either matched or exceeded their expectations.

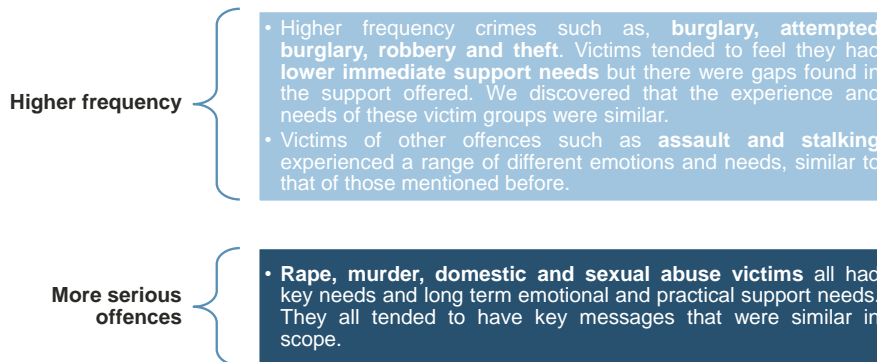
Victims of more serious offences, such as sexual assault and murder often had a range of very intense and long-term needs, given the effect the incidents had on them. Furthermore the needs of these victims changed over time. Although mainly positive about the support they receive eventually, the process of receiving support is often complicated and provision is felt to be inconsistent.

There was notably some confusion around the referral process for victim support services, especially amongst victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault. Victims not engaged in the criminal justice system often felt as if they had not been offered sufficient support.

## 3.1 Segmenting victims along crime type

Victims of certain crime types had similar needs, experiences and issues. These were broadly segmented into *higher frequency* and *more serious offences*. Throughout this report we comment on the needs of these clustered crime types, while also highlighting any other factors which play a role in influencing a victims' experience.

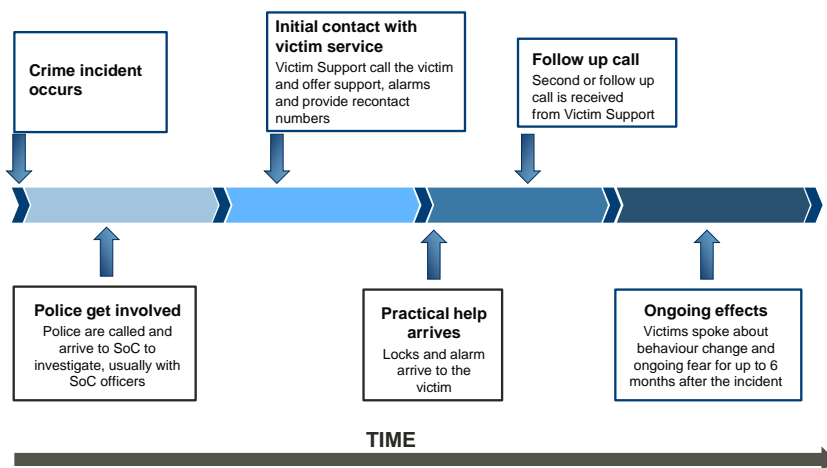
Figure 3.1 – Segments of victims



### 3.2 Typical higher frequency crime victim experience

Victims of burglary or theft typically contacted the police in the first instance and then family and friends were included to provide support. **Victim's describe shock, anger and initially fear**. This usually evolves into anger and positive behaviour change involving being more careful and aware.

Figure 3.2 – Sequence of events for higher frequency crime types



Victim Support contact tended to come as a surprise to those experiencing lower level crime types. Most had not expected that they would be contacted for what they felt was such a “minor” crime. Contact usually happened very shortly after the crime had occurred and was most commonly a phone call. Many found the initial phone call very reassuring even if they felt it was not necessary for them.



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To know that someone is on the other end of the phone was important.

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Most were offered home alarms, locks and bag alarms which were well received. These tended to arrive a short time after the phone call.

Victims typically **refused any additional support** (beyond alarms and locks) since they did not feel they needed it. There was a view that support was only really supposed to be for people without friends and family around them. With most **relying on family and friends for support**, some said they had family to stay after the incident, or that they went to stay with them.

However some describe; even months later - fear of noises in their house, lack of trust in others and other issues stemming from their experience. Victims lacked awareness of what additional support, such as counselling, could have done for them.



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I didn't want to leave the house; someone had to be in the house. I seemed to cry a lot at the drop of a hat. I felt invaded, I was annoyed but sad.

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### *Burglary case study*

*Jane is an elderly lady living alone in Chelmsford. She left her home to go to the shops by car and on her return discovered that somebody had smashed the patio doors at the rear of the property, leaving glass shattered over the carpet. Jane could see black footprints, from the mud in the garden, over her carpet heading upstairs. She did not want to enter her home in case the offender was still inside. She went to her neighbour's house where she phoned the police who came over to secure the property.*

*She returned to the property with the police and discovered that two laptops had been stolen. Although she was not particularly upset about the loss of the laptops as they did not have sentimental value - she felt angry about the fact people had been through her possessions.*

*Jane's son and her sister came over to comfort her and she was very happy to have this support from them. Her neighbour also came over a few times to make sure she felt ok. She feels better now that she has new doors which are more secure.*

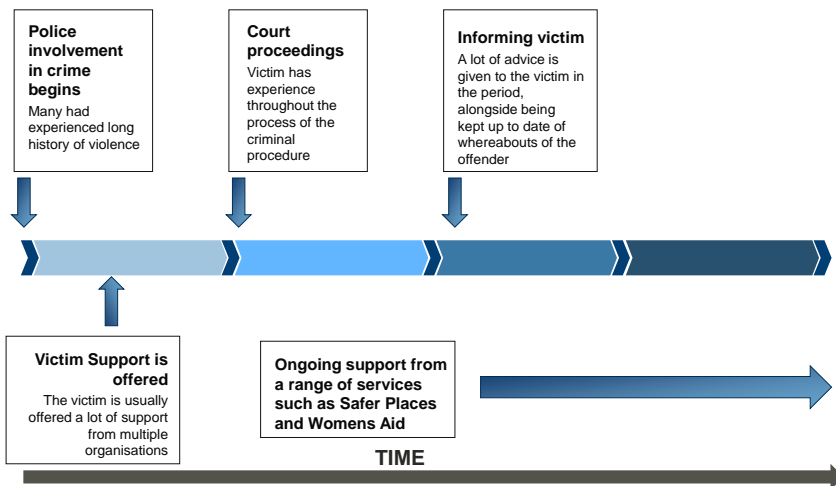
*Jane remembers receiving a phone call from Victim Support. Alongside this the police had given her some leaflets about making her house more secure. She received some alarms and door locks in the post. She did receive a follow up phone call but did not request any additional support although she was offered it. She did not feel she needed any more help although she reported that she felt fearful when coming home to what she might find for the first couple of months after the burglary. Four months after the incident she found that she no longer thought about it.*

### **3.3 Typical victim of domestic abuse experience**

**Shock, fear, terror and hurt** were the most common emotions that victims of domestic abuse reported experiencing.

Most victims report **on-going fear** and **fear of re-victimisation**. For most this was not a "one-off" incident; the abuse had typically been a long term problem that had not gone away. Many report feeling safer at home when the offender was in prison. They also reported worry about re-victimisation and some had taken actions to stop this happening such as informing police of events they may attend that they worried the offender may target.

Figure 3.3 – Sequence of events for a victim of domestic violence



Victims of domestic abuse recalled being offered a **wide range of support from multiple organisations** such as Women’s Aid. Initially many said this was overwhelming and confusing.



The phone didn’t stop ringing, it was really overwhelming. So many different organisations all offering the same things



Most did not realise which agency/service to go to for specific needs, such as finding out what area the offender was going to be living in when released, and where to go for emotional support.



I am getting a bit nervous as his licence is up in August....There are restraining orders and prohibitive steps in place but I know him, so he could wake up one day and think “I don’t care about the orders” and that’s what he’s like.



Many accepted that they needed support, such as **counselling, emotional support and practical advice** to do with courts, and help with financial issues.

### *Victim of domestic abuse case study*

*Mary had been married to her husband for many years but three years ago she began to experience a change in him. Her husband had recently become ill and was diagnosed with depression but he refused to take the medication that his doctor had prescribed. He became very angry and started to take out his anger on her. The incidents were just verbal at first but they soon became physical. Initially Mary tried to deal with this on her own but the beatings became more severe, so she decided to call the police.*

*The police visited her residence several times. Eventually her husband was temporarily removed from the premises and then placed under section for 28 days under the Mental Health Act.*

*This experience has been extremely traumatic for Mary but her family have been incredibly supportive emotionally and financially. Mary felt that the police were not very helpful when she sought advice and support. All she kept being told is that she needed to divorce her husband or she could call the Samaritans if she needed to speak to someone. Mary eventually came across a charity that helps victims of domestic abuse. The support Mary has received from them has been outstanding, she felt they truly cared for her and listened to her.*

*Mary did not recall ever being called by Victim Support about what services would be available to her. She felt that the police should have been far more supportive and ensured that she had the support she needed.*

### **3.4 Typical victim of sexual assault or rape experience**

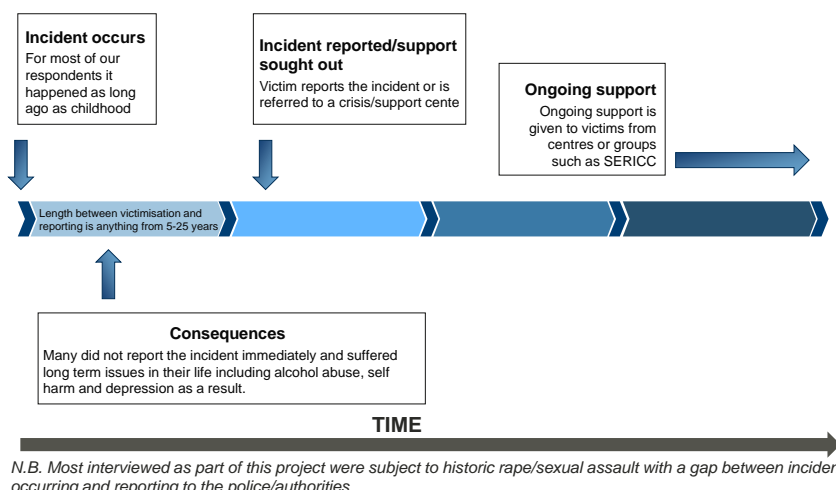
Victims felt **support should begin when they report incidents to the police**, and were surprised and often **angry at the lack of compassion** they felt from the officers they were first in contact with. Much of the feedback focussed on the need for police officers to have **special training** in this area, and to deal with victims more sensitively and appropriately.

Overall, it was felt that **Victim Support lacked the knowledge of where to refer victims to appropriate services**, and most felt they **did not actually receive any beneficial help** or support from Victim Support. One victim stated she had no contact from Victim Support, and instead approached her local council who were helping her with housing issues, and they referred her to an appropriate counselling service.

Victims felt that whilst Victim Support did call them after referral from the police, and did offer support, but they did not have **the knowledge of their**

local area or what was on offer for them to access for their particular needs. Victim Support callers would tell the victim to call if they needed anything else, but believing they had nothing to offer them – the victim did not tend to call and this is where contact with Victim Support typically ended.

Figure 3.4 – Sequence of events for sexual assault



Leaving the victims **without an appropriate support** network after reporting can be **dangerous**, with one victim stating She felt suicidal, as a result of feeling alone and unsupported. This was also reported when long waiting times occurred between referral to services and appointments.

Those interviewed as part of this project tended to be categorised as **historic rape/sexual assault** with a substantial time gap between incident occurring and reporting to the police.



I was nervous and worried all the time. I shut myself away through my teens, and isolated myself



During this time, other needs emerged relating to dealing with the sexual abuse such as **substance abuse, sex addiction, anger issues, emotional 'stunting', depression, self-harm and post-traumatic stress disorder.**



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**In 2008 I was diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder due to the sexual abuse and [a] psychologist referred me to [a]rape crisis centre**

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These needs are described as equally important to have support for as the sexual assault or rape itself, which should not be viewed in isolation. It should be built into a package of support offered to victims.

**Most victims participating in the study experienced the abuse when they were young, at the hands of a family member.** They were also typically victims of **repeated abuse** from the perpetrators. The abuses either went unreported or, were not taken seriously.

Once they become engaged with services, victims **require a lot of support.** Victims often only became engaged with services when referred from another agency they were seeking help from for one of their other related issues, and then only came to report their crime after this point. Many spoke about **fear in reporting** due to fears of not being believed or having other ramifications such as their children being taken away from them.



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**I was desperate for help. I acted out in various destructive ways before got counselling here.**

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### *Victim of sexual assault/rape case study*

*Sarah was first sexually assaulted when she was 11 years old by a family member. This continued until she was raped at 13 years old and her sexual abuse continued until she was 15 years old.*

*Sarah states that she had repressed her feelings throughout adolescence and her twenties, never telling anyone about the assaults. She became very depressed, and reported that she had attempted suicide at one point. She feels the on-going assault has left her "emotionally stunted" and often finds it hard to connect with others and show her emotions to her children.*

*She decided to report the assaults to the police when she was 28 years old. She stated this brought up many repressed feelings, stating "telling the police...brought up lots of feelings. It then took a year before the court case." She feels she had to "pester" the police for a referral to counselling services specific to her needs. Initially the police referred her to Victim Support, who called her once and "said for me to call them if I needed anything". She did not feel they had the appropriate skills to help her and she did not seek further support from Victim Support.*

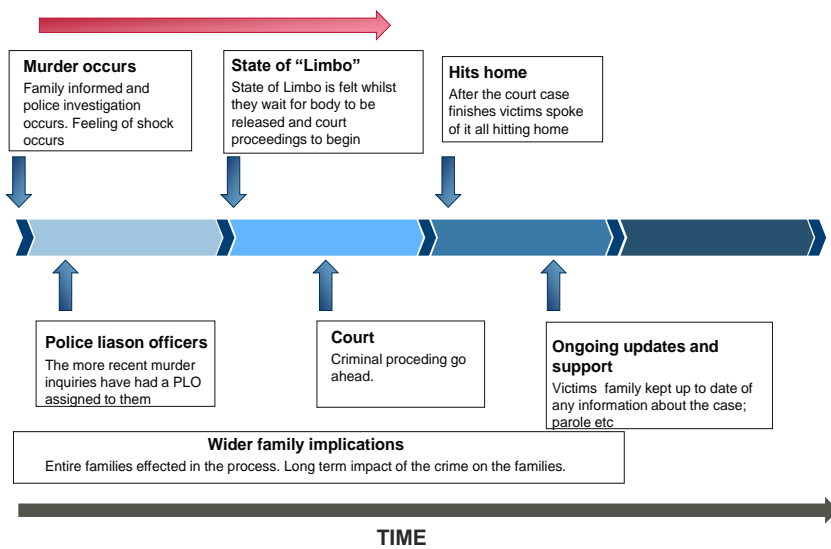
*She now feels she is getting better, having received counselling, but feels she still has progress to make. She also has to travel 14 miles to the counselling service, and feels that it should be more local/accessible. She feels that at 28 years old and having been abused from 11 years old she should have had more support before now. There was a very long waiting time from referral. She was told there was a 12 week waiting list but ended up waiting 5 months for a first appointment.*

### **3.5 Typical family experience of a victim of murder**

The murder victim's family typically feel stunned, devastated and described themselves as in a state of shock at the news. Help is initially needed to cope with being in a state of shock and to navigate the range of people they need to engage with, such as the police, hospital staff and coroners.

There are also a lot of practical information needs that families have such as needing dates the body will be released and court appearance times and arrangements.

Figure 3.5 – Sequence of events for the families of murder victims



Those whose family member was murdered a long time ago (as long as 25 years ago) tended to recall a poor experience with the police and victim services at the time and did not feel like they were engaged or supported appropriately. They felt that they were treated with a lack of empathy and seen as secondary to the case. One family described having to get to the court buildings very early to ensure they would have seats in the public gallery to see the trial (as no consideration/priority was given to them), or not being told when they would be able to get the body released.

Recent engagement with support services, mainly via the Probation Service, has however been very good and reassuring. A dedicated point of contact, acting as a liaison between the family and the prison service and offender was felt to work really effectively and provide first the right level of information and support.



She [the support from the probation service] has been my rock; she rings me up, gives me all the information and is available whenever I need her.



The wider family were not felt to have received the support they felt necessary. Parents of murdered victims relate wider issues that other family members are experiencing as stemming from the murder. These other

effects include family breakdown, alcoholism and not being able to hold down a job typically amongst siblings of the deceased.

### **3.6 Typical experience of parents of a child abuse victim**

Those interviewed where their child had been abused by someone close to the family such as a friend or an ex-partner, typically sought out support services to not only help their child but themselves as well. These parents often felt that they required support to help them both emotionally and to navigate the available areas of support for their child as well.

## 4 Key support needs

Chapter 4 discusses in more detail the process victims of crime typically go through when seeking support and advice to deal with the aftermath of being a victim of crime.

### Key findings

Victim's friends and family are a key source of support for most victims, especially those experiencing lower level crimes.

For more serious crime types, whilst friends and family are a part of a support network, they themselves may be seriously affected by the crime and in turn would benefit from support too.

Usually victims gain support at the beginning of the life cycle of the crime, though many felt that as the process went on they were not supported along its life span. For example at the end of the court proceedings or on the anniversary of the crime; a time when victims of more serious crimes were often feeling particularly emotional and prone to reliving past trauma.

Victims see the police as a key individual to liaise with. As they are usually the first point of contact sensitivity, care and consideration by the police is a necessity.

### 4.1 The role of Victim Support in engaging victims in the support process

The process of being contacted by Victim Support was **largely uniform across most victims who reported a crime to the police, and where the police officer recognised that a crime had been committed** (this was an issue for domestic abuse) when victims often felt that the incident was not being treated as a crime by the police.

Victims typically recalled that they had been asked by the police whether they would be happy for their details to be passed on to Victim Support, and that they were contacted as a result. Some victims recalled being sent a letter from Victim Support in advance of being called.

For the great majority of victims who reported their crime to the police, Victim Support made contact directly, usually via the telephone. Some victims then received a second phone call. These tended to be to more vulnerable victims, such as the elderly.



Victims were unanimously pleased to be contacted by Victim Support, particularly the phone call. They often reported that purely hearing from someone who is concerned about them as a victim of crime is comforting.



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I was surprised to get it. They phoned me up and it was really good to hear from someone, even though I wouldn't go looking for it

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## 4.2 Avenues of support taken by burglary/theft victims

Many of the higher frequency burglary and theft victims **did not feel they required much support from victim services**. While they were pleased to hear from Victim Support, they did not feel they required direct support from them.

Nevertheless, these victims tended to welcome the call they received from Victim Support, as it gave them **reassurance** that someone was available to speak with them should they need it.



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I spoke to someone and she was really kind, she was a really nice lady – it was nice to have a voice on the other end of the phone

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It was unbelievable; I didn't think that such a minor crime would lead to such a follow up

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Victim Support nevertheless tended to send through information to the victim about ways they can secure their homes and personal possessions in the future. This kind of advice was typically well-received, with victims mentioning that they received **useful practical advice** that they were not aware of previously. Many victims said that they took direct action as a result. For example, some said they had added locks to windows or would be more careful about where they secured their belongings. In addition some have changed their behaviour; taking more **care protecting their possessions** when out of the home, and recommending ways to do so to friends and family.

Victim Support typically sent through an alarm or locks to help prevent repeat victimisation. While these were rarely requested directly, they were always welcomed and tended to be used. For example, a theft victim reported that she now takes further precautions to protect her handbag whenever she is out at the shops and makes sure the bag is zipped-up. This was despite her saying that she did not require any formal support.



They asked me did I want someone to talk to but I didn't. We talked about deterrents and they sent out some window alarms and door alarms for free which is good as some people can't afford that. They said I could get back to them and I got a phone number – it was very good. We didn't speak again as I didn't feel I needed to as I wasn't traumatised.



Victims of these offences rarely felt they needed any emotional support. Most stated that the offence affected them in a relatively moderate way emotionally and that they had the support of friends and family to cope. This finding comes in contrast to the reported effects of these crimes, with many saying that they were fearful of being victimised in the same way in the future.



I'm not a good victim - I didn't want to cry about it ... If I saw a shrink or whatever they might open me up to thinking about all sorts of things, then I'd end up worrying even more.



They offered to send someone around, but we're quite a robust family ... I've been through quite a lot in my life, I didn't feel that I needed to speak to an outsider, personally I prefer to deal with things myself.



Those who did go on to receive some emotional support felt that it was helpful. While they did not feel they were particularly affected by the incident they found the opportunity to talk it through helpful. Support helped re-assure them that they were a victim due to circumstance, rather than a personal attack. The counselling was also, on occasion perceived to offer them support in other aspects of their lives.



#### 4.2.1 Key support gaps for victims of theft/burglary

Victims were conscious that some victims of the same offence could require more support if they had been particularly deeply affected.

It also worth reflecting that despite saying they did not need any further support, almost all victims of burglary and theft interviewed mentioned that they had been emotionally affected to some degree in the immediate aftermath of the incident. It was clear that the incident had deeply affected some participants, saying they had stress or anxiety for at least a few weeks following the incident. However there was a sense that many victims were not aware that some counselling may help them. For

example one burglary victim did not initially want to receive counselling and only received some because her husband mentioned that it could not do her any harm.



My wife could have done with more help and support, some sort of counselling; it's left a mental scar, she doesn't feel safe in the house anymore.



It wasn't excessive, it was rather good. I was pleased ... and they said I could call the back ... had I needed more support I'm sure they would have given it.



### 4.3 Typical avenues of support for sexual assault/domestic abuse victims

Sexual assault and domestic abuse victims tended to have very **mixed paths towards support**. Most had typically been through the support services SERICC or Safer Places. Some victims were initially referred onto specialist sexual assault support centres via Victim Support, while others were directly approached by the support centre themselves. Victims who had not reported the crime to the police fell into the latter category. However some who had reported their crime to the police, found themselves approaching the support centre via a third party or directly rather than through the police or Victim Support.

Victims of domestic abuse tended to have **poor recollection of whether they had spoken to Victim Support**. While many spoke with a support organisation, most were unable to name the organisation. Some domestic abuse victims found the process of retelling their story to multiple agencies and organisations quite frustrating, as it brought up distressing feelings

Many victims of domestic abuse **did not recall receiving a call from support services initially**, despite reporting their crime to the police. There was a sense of frustration that the police had not considered their case to be a criminal offence, and so had not passed on their details. As such, these victims sought support groups directly.

Sexual assault victims tended to consider their **contact with the police as the first point of support**. Many were quite disappointed by the interaction they had with the police, particularly in terms of the manner in which the police officer engaged with them and the difficulty in being seen as a victim of crime. Most victims mentioned that they simply wanted to be **recognised**

as a **victim** by the police officer and that they were not taken seriously when they first made contact with the police.

Perceptions of the support that Victim Support provided were varied. There were some instances of victims stating that Victim Support would not refer them onto a support group unless the accused was actually prosecuted. Victims were surprised that they were unable to be referred on directly, as they had **significant needs and viewed themselves as victims**. Some mentioned that when they were in contact with Victim Support, they did not refer them onto a support agency. As such, these victims had to make their own enquiries about how to get direct support. For example one victim was referred on to SERICC via their local council.

Victims mentioned that the **waiting lists for support services were quite long**. While they appreciated that the demand for services was high they felt that they could have been kept more up to date with when they were going to get support. Victims who were waiting for long periods of time to receive support felt vulnerable as they were not sure whether they would ultimately receive help. One victim commented that she felt suicidal during this period; but that she would have felt better had she known that she was definitely going to be seen.

Furthermore, it was felt that Victim Support could remain in closer contact with the support agency to ensure that their referral was being followed through. Victims therefore often did not feel that Victim Support were equipped enough to provide the **personalised support and response** they required.

It was also mentioned that while Victim Support provided some assistance, much of the advice and recommendations they gave was very general and not tailored to their needs as a victim of sexual assault. It was felt that they needed support that was very much tailored to their needs as a victim of sexual assault such as long term counselling for the life problems they associated with their being a victim of crime.



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**They are always there when I need them...they are constant support. I've worked with them for last 2 and a half years with the same worker who has been amazing.**



#### 4.3.1 Perceptions of sexual assault support groups

Sexual assault victims were very satisfied with the support they received at the centres.



SERICC offered a variety of individual and group sessions that were said to help the women come to terms with the abuse they had received. These activities included counselling, mindfulness, meditation and group discussions.



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**It is so welcoming and comfortable here. I can talk about things I never could before...the group meetings are really good here because they have all been through what I have and it's so good to know it's not just me.**

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It was clear from the women's experiences that many had several issues within their lives that while not directly associated with the assault itself, were nevertheless linked. For example some women reported that they had drug and alcohol addiction issues that were prompted as a result of their experiences as a victim. It was felt that victim services should be aware of these wider issues and have the ability to refer on to relevant support groups.

#### 4.3.2 Families of sexual abuse victims

Counselling for both parents is needed alongside support for the victim of child abuse themselves. It was felt this could be joint or separate services. Practical sessions to recognise abuse and signs were also felt to be useful. It was also felt that clearer and more consistent signposting needed to be given to the parents of sexual abuse victims in order for them to find clear avenues to support at an earlier stage.

### 4.4 Typical avenues of support for murder victim's families

Most of the families of murder victims who engaged in the research had **long-term engagement with support services** as the incidents occurred many years ago. Typically the services they focussed on discussing involved more recent support received from the probation service.

Families of murder victims often did not recall having direct support from Victim Support at the time of the murder. Typically they will have found out that their relative had been murdered by a specialist police officer, and they would have immediately been placed into contact with a victim liaison officer. Provision was felt to be patchy with some victims receiving **intensive support and information** from the victim liaison officer, and others feeling they had no support or guidance.

The role of the victim liaison officer was to guide the victim's family through the justice process and sign-post them to support agencies as they were needed. This **support was on-going for some**, with victim's families reporting that the officer accompanied them to court, told them about the process, and then following sentencing, kept them informed about the offender's period in custody.

Other families, whilst reporting very poor levels of support up to the trial, were positive about support they now receive from the probation service. This contact served to keep families fully informed of the offender's progress through their sentence.

Following sentencing, murder victim's families were very keen to understand where the offender was in the prison system. They were particularly concerned with those offenders nearing release, or being granted short-term leave from prison for personal or family reasons. Families were keen to know that they would not be allowed near to their home or area, and were fearful of one day bumping into them locally. Some families had **feelings of frustration about the justice system** more widely, and it was deemed important for the support worker to keep them well informed about progress.

Murder victim's family tended to speak very highly of the **personal support** they received from the probation service. The support workers were seen to be very proactive in informing the victim about the state of their case and the status of the offender (e.g. when they would be considered for parole, on licence or what category of prison they were in). Often they felt that they built up a **high level of trust** with the individual who supported them, and felt they could call them up at any point as needed.

#### 4.4.1 Key gaps for the families of murder victims

The families of murder victims often recalled how the **incident had affected many lives deeply**, including the whole family, friends and colleagues. There was frustration however that the key support tended to be focussed on just closest relatives, typically the parents. It was felt that it would be useful for **further support to be offered to wider family members** directly, to help them come to terms with what had happened.

Families of murder victims often described the indelible impact the incident had on the lives of wider family, and that they had to continually live with the pain of losing someone so close to them so brutally. It was common for the lives of siblings of the deceased to be badly affected, with parents often telling of relationship problems, issues with drugs, alcohol and depression. While the families of murder victims were affected a great deal emotionally by the incident, not all said they had received professional counselling for their bereavement. Many stated that they had been offered counselling services at some point after being victimised, but not for a number of years

since the incident. It may therefore be of value to regularly **re-connect with victims of such serious offences and offer appropriate support.**

#### 4.5 Typical avenues of support for victims of assault

The victims of assault engaged with typically found that Victim Support called a week or two after the incident took place. Similarly to burglary, victims found that having someone they can speak with gave them great reassurance.



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**Just having someone there for you is so important, if you're feeling alone or having suicidal thoughts - if it's 3am in the morning, you don't want to call your friends or family**

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Some victims commented that some of the **emotional trauma** of being assaulted emerged sometime after the incident, post being called by Victim Support. It may therefore be of value to call assault victims again sometime after the incident to check they are coping. Another victim had subsequently visited the charity Mind offices to get counselling, but commented that the location was somewhere near where the incident had occurred, which made it difficult for her to attend.

One assault victim also mentioned that they would have liked to have some practical advice on the injuries they had sustained and felt that a **more joined up approach** between medical services and Victim Support is needed.

#### 4.6 Perceptions of the quality of support received

Many victims fed back that the quality of support they received was very high. In almost all cases, victims mentioned that those they came into contact with acted with integrity and professionalism.

Key to the praise received was that the workers cared about the individual's situation. For many, just knowing that somebody independent was genuinely concerned and sympathetic towards their situation was very comforting.



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**It's amazing to think that this is how [Victim Support] go about things with a minor crime; it must be ten times more support with something serious**

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When the victim came into contact with specialist professional staff they found that they were highly skilled and understood the needs of the victims.

#### 4.7 The role of family and friends in the victim experience

Family and friends play a key role in the support of victims, irrespective of the crime. Victims reported that often those closest to them would be on hand to **talk with them about what had happened and offer a sense of perspective**. Victims often found that their family and friends provided them with the emotional support they needed, meaning that formal counselling was often not required.

Family and friends also provided more practical support in terms of helping the victim 'get back on their feet' after the incident. This ranged from helping them secure their home and visiting the home to make sure it was secure, to making enquiries about insurance claims and providing information about relevant support groups. A common example reported was the role of neighbours in checking on the victim's property after it had been burgled.

The impact of friends and family is significant to such a degree that even very old and vulnerable adults felt that they did not require the help of Victim Support after the incident – due to strong family support networks.

Across the interviews the great majority of victims were able to **lean on the support of those closest to them**. Therefore it is also worth reflecting on the gap this creates for victims who do not have a strong network around them. For such cases it is therefore important that support services are available to step in to fill this gap.



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Had I not had a family around me then yes I would have done [sought some support]. If no family support was around then I would have needed someone to tell what had happened. You need help on insurance and that kind of thing.

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#### 4.8 The role of the police

Many victims recognised the police officer in their case as the first point of support. These victims felt that the police were partly responsible for safeguarding them and letting them know the next steps.

Fundamental to this view was that **the police should see the person affected as the victim**. While this was normally recognised, some victims of crime, in particular victims of sexual assault and domestic abuse, found that the police did not always see them as victims. These victims expected

some form of sympathy from the police, but did not always find they were treated seriously as victims.

Some victims were disappointed in particular by the **attitude** of the police. Sometimes it was felt that they were too **blunt and not sensitive enough** to the victim's needs, and that they were purely focussed on the criminal element of the incident, rather than the feelings of the victim affected. On the other hand, some victims mentioned that they were pleased by how responsive and helpful the police had been, particularly in relation to theft and burglary crimes.

A few victims mentioned that police should be further trained in order to **deal more sensitively** with victims at a personal level.

# 5 How victim services should be delivered ideally

Chapter 5 outlines how participants feel services would work best for their crime type. During the interviews victims were asked to design their ideal support services. Combining the suggestions that were made during this part of the discussion with experiences where services were felt to work well and where there were clear gaps identified,

## Key findings

The police are a key group to be a part of the ideal system. This is because they are usually the first point of contact therefore sensitivity, care and consideration by the police is a necessity.

Victim Support should be able to be a liaising and co-ordinating organisation for the support for both the victim and the providers. Knowledge of where support centres are and what they specialise in is important. It is vital for the victim that they are provided with the most convenient and specialist organisation.

It was felt that Victim Support should act as a comprehensive directory for all relevant and local services.

Victims may have multiple care needs and victim support services should be ensuring all are met.

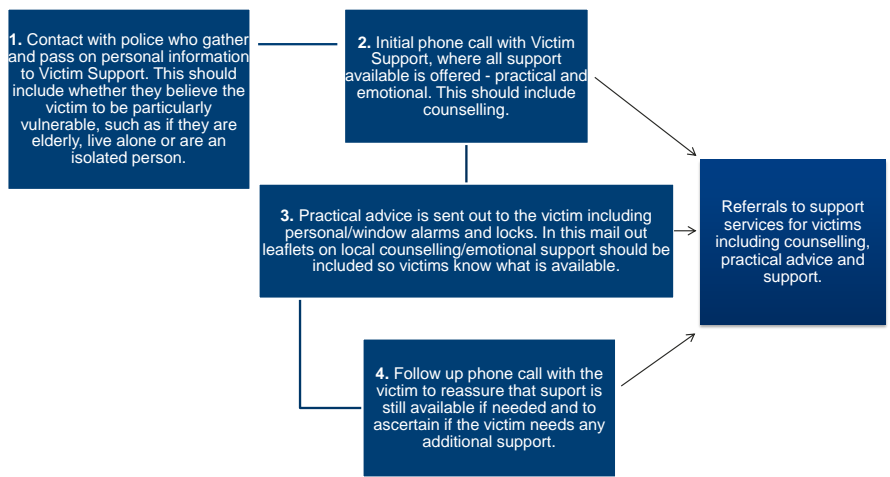
## 5.1 How support services should work for victims of burglary/theft

Victims overall were very positive about the support they were offered. Although most did not request additional support and were happy with just the practical steps offered such as the alarms and locks, most did not recognise the benefits to them of counselling.

Support for after effects, such as fear of noises in the night, suspicion of people and being scared of returning home were not typically addressed by Victim Support.

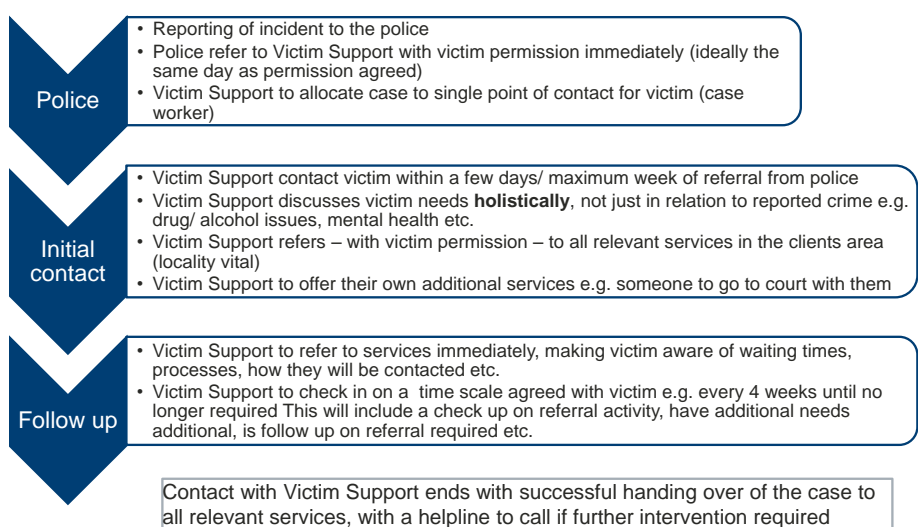
Although victims cannot be made to accept additional support, the support on offer could be “sold” to them in a better way. For example one victim of burglary went along to a counselling session after their partner said to go

along: “what harm could it do”. They found it very useful to have someone to talk to and go over the incident with someone who was outside of the family and friends network.



## 5.2 Victims of sexual assault or rape have a lot of needs and support for many problems

Sexual assault victims engaging in the research were subject to historic rape or sexual assault with a gap between incident occurring and reporting to the police or authorities. Since the incident many other needs had emerged relating to the sexual assault. Most victims experienced their incident when they were young often at the hands of a family member. Most of those interviewed were victims of repeated abuse from the perpetrators. The crimes either went unreported or were dismissed out of hand. As such there are several key aspects of the ideal service they would like to receive.



### 5.3 Parents of child abuse have similar needs to those of sexual assault or rape but with some specific issues

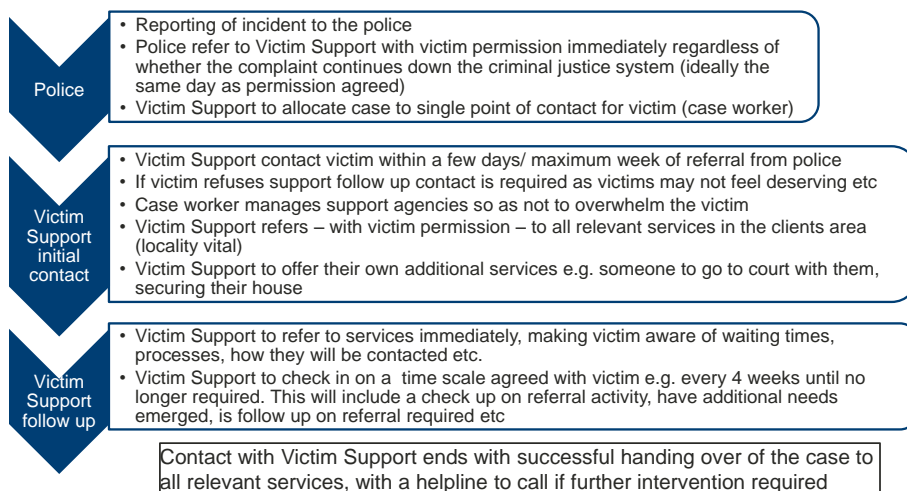
Parents needed counselling and support and felt that this was vital, it was felt that it was really important that they are as equally supported as the actual victim themselves. A sense of immediacy to receiving the support was expressed too.

The parents should be contacted by support service the day after the crime is reported, referral should be done regardless of whether social services have become involved in the case or not. Practical advice was also felt to be needed throughout the criminal justice process; parents said that they needed information on the court processes for this sort of crime and how long procedures take. Some of those interviewed felt that they needed the support meetings to happen in an external place not the home.

The support needs to be separate and integrated to the support that is offered to the victim of child abuse, this may be through joint and separate sessions.

### 5.4 How support services should work for victims of domestic abuse

Victims of domestic violence had similar ideas how an ideal support system would work to victims of sexual assault or rape. However there were some clear differences; victims of domestic abuse may experience feelings of being unworthy or not being ready for the support. This should not be a barrier to Victim Support, who should accommodate and monitor the situation for the victim with the ideal outcome being the victim continuing down the support pathway.





### Victim of domestic abuse case study

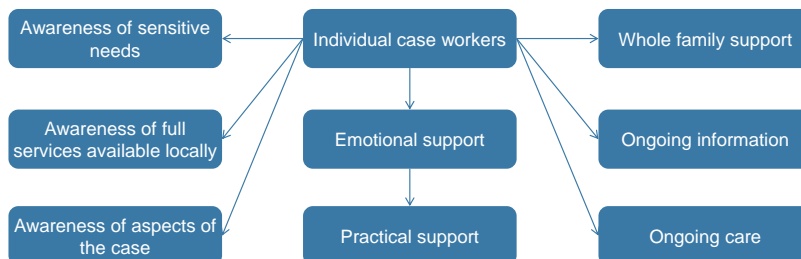
Over the last few years Kate has experienced harassment from her ex-partner. Kate took out a restraining order against him but he continued to violate this. Kate's ex-partner was imprisoned several times for breaking into her premises and threatening her with violence. However, every time he was released he continued to harass Kate. Kate was provided with a special police phone, so if her ex-partner broke into her home she would have a direct line to the police and they could assist her immediately.

Shortly after the first incident Kate was contacted by Victim Support. Kate's experience of Victim Support has been "brilliant" and they really helped her to get through these incidents. Once Victim support had made first contact, Kate was provided with a key supporter worker, who she built a trusting relationship with and who contacted her after each incident took place. When her ex-partners restraining order expired Victim Support ensured that a new order was put in place immediately. Kate also recalled being passed several other support numbers by Victim Support but she decided that she did not need to access these services. Victim support equally updated Kate on the court cases that she did not need to attend, to ensure that she knew the outcome of the case. Kate had a very good experience with Victim Support and she felt that they had done a "really, really good job" and supported her "all the way through".

## 5.5 Families of murder victims ideal support system

Families of murder victims need joined-up care for the whole family, not just focussed on the parents and children of the victim. Siblings and wider family are affected. The emotional and counselling care offered needs to feel personal and local. A single case worker is recommended as many victims will not want to have to explain details of the crime repetitively. The families also tend to bond with their case worker and trust them. A long term relationship is needed.

Ongoing support is needed especially if there is information to do with the case, such as parole hearings or release conditions.



## 6 Summary of findings across crime types

Overall the provision of victim services in Essex is perceived to be working well. The majority of experiences are positive – victims are grateful for the support they have received. The gaps in support tended to be about routes to support rather than the quality or content of the support offered.

A few practical solutions could improve the effectiveness of access to support – these include quicker referrals, better signposting and comprehensive central knowledge of local and specialist help.

It is clear that a number of organisations are involved in influencing the victim's perception of support. A more joined-up approach from the police, Victim Support and the support providers would ease the provision of support to those most in need.

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