

Victims of crime and society: student's opinion

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Riassunto

Il presente contributo è volto a focalizzare l'attenzione sull'immagine della vittima di reato e sulla percezione che gli studenti universitari hanno di questa. In particolare ci si concentra sull'opinione degli studenti riguardo alla condizione delle vittime del crimine nella nostra società. Al fine di individuare le opinioni più comuni tra gli studenti, si farà riferimento ad una ricerca, realizzata in parte attraverso la somministrazione di un questionario a 369 studenti dell'Università di Bologna, e ci si soffermerà in particolare su alcuni *items* concernenti la definizione di vittima, i problemi e le conseguenze che la vittima di un crimine deve affrontare, i sentimenti che gli studenti provano nei confronti di questa, le loro opinioni riguardo al trattamento giudiziario della vittima rispetto al reo e quelle relative ai centri di supporto alle vittime.

Résumé

Le but de cet article est de se focaliser sur l'image de la victime du crime et sur la perception que les étudiants universitaires ont de celle-ci. En particulier, je vais me concentrer sur l'opinion des étudiants à propos de la condition des victimes de crimes dans notre société. Afin de connaître les opinions les plus communes parmi les étudiants, je ferai référence à une recherche réalisée par le biais d'un questionnaire auprès d'un échantillon de 369 étudiants de l'Université de Bologne et j'examinerai quelques sujets, en particulier ceux concernant la définition de victime, les problèmes et les conséquences de la victimisation, les sentiments des étudiants envers la victime, leurs opinions à propos du traitement judiciaire réservé à la victime par rapport à celui réservé au coupable et, enfin, celles sur les centres d'aide aux victimes.

Abstract

This article is about the victim of crime and the student's perception of the victim. In particular, I will analyse the student's opinion about the state, condition and support of the victims of crime.

In order to gauge students opinion, I will present the research performed through a questionnaire, which was given to 369 students of the University of Bologna. In particular I will analyze the following items: the definition of the victim, the problems and consequences of the victimisation; the sentiment that the students feel towards the victim, the opinion that the students have about the judicial treatment of the victim as regard to the offender, and about the victim support.

1. The research.

Today in Italy the victims don't have any special dispensation either State or private/social organisations, so it is very difficult to have an understanding of what the victims must face, after a traumatic experience. If we accept the Council Framework Decision of 15 March 2001 on the standing of victims in criminal proceedings that the victim is described as <<a natural person who has suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering or economic loss, directly caused by acts or omissions that are in violation of the criminal law of a Member State>>

(Art. 1 - Council Framework Decision of 15 March 2001 on the standing of victims in criminal proceeding) we understand what the victim must have experienced, not as a passive subject of a criminal interaction, but as a subject that needs specific treatment to overcome the trauma itself (mental shock, for example).

To gauge the opinions of the students, I will present some research (through) using a victimisation survey given to 369 students of the University of Bologna.

In particular, I will analyse the following points about five questions:

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1. the definition of the victim;
2. the problems and consequences that the victim of crime must face;
3. the feelings that the students have towards the victim;
4. the opinion that the students have about the judicial treatment of the victim as regard to the aggressor;
5. the opinions about victim support.

In this case the survey is designed to elicit the different opinions of the students about the condition of the victim of crime in our society. The questionnaire was anonymous, it includes 22 questions and another seven questions on social and private data. The data has been processed in aggregate form. The data has been processed by using SPSS software.

We conducted a survey, 369 students were questioned in the following faculties: Political Science Bologna, Political Science Forli, Psychology Cesena; and in the following department within the faculties: Political Science, Social Services, Sociology, Sociology and Criminal Science (SSCS), Criminology and Criminal Investigation (CAPIS), Science of Social Behaviour, Foundation in Criminology and Victimology. The lectures involved are: Criminology, Methodology of the criminology survey, criminology seminar, criminal sociology, deviance sociology and politics of security. We asked a number of questions and have compiled the following results.

1. The question was: according to you, a victim is above all?

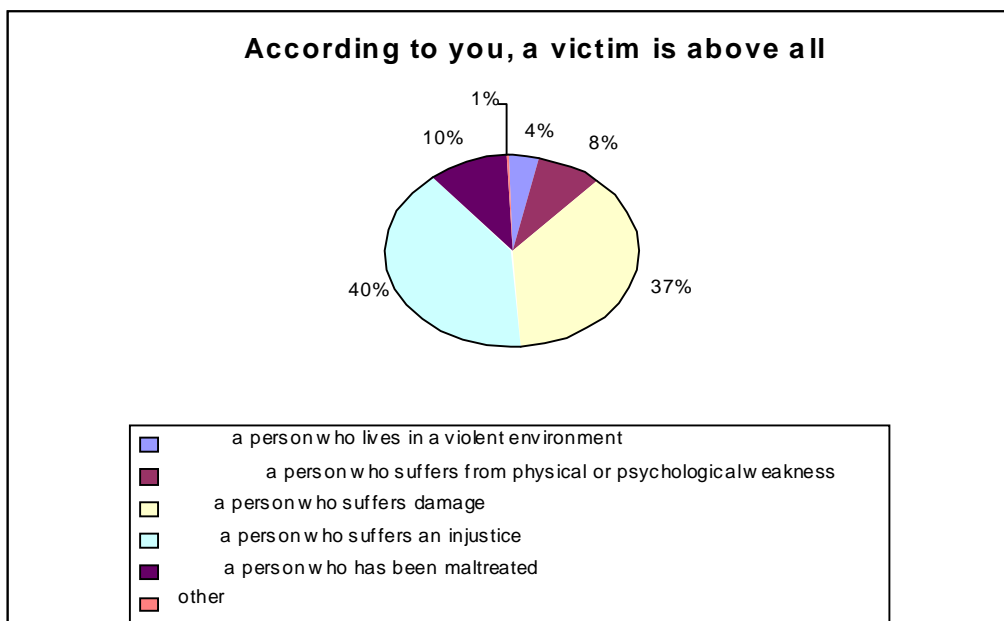


Figure 1: According to you, a victim is above all?

As you can see, the majority of the students respond that the victim is “a person who suffers an injustice”, but 37% say that the victim is “a person who suffers injury (damage)”, 10% answer that the victim is “a

person who has been treated bad”, for the 8% of interviewees the victim is “a person who suffers from physical or psychological weakness” and only a small percentage of students think that a violent environment affects possibility of victimisation.

2. The question was: what are the problems a victim of crime has to deal with?

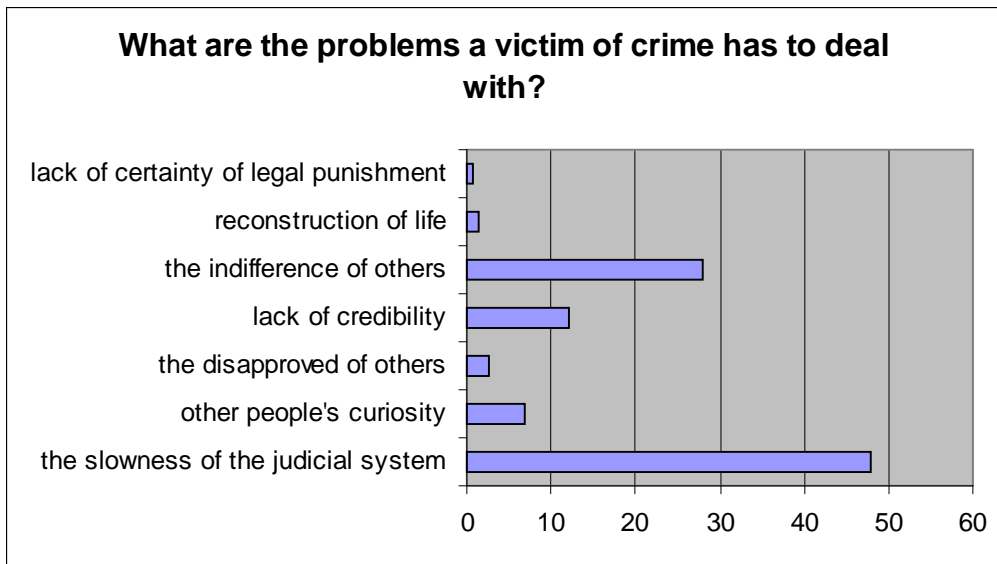


Figure 2: *What are the problems a victim of crime has to deal with?*

As you can see, a majority, 47.8% percent responded that the most important problem is the slowness of the judicial system, but 27.9% think that the most important difficult for the victim is about the indifference of others.

3. The question was: in your opinion which area does a victim of crime suffer the most:

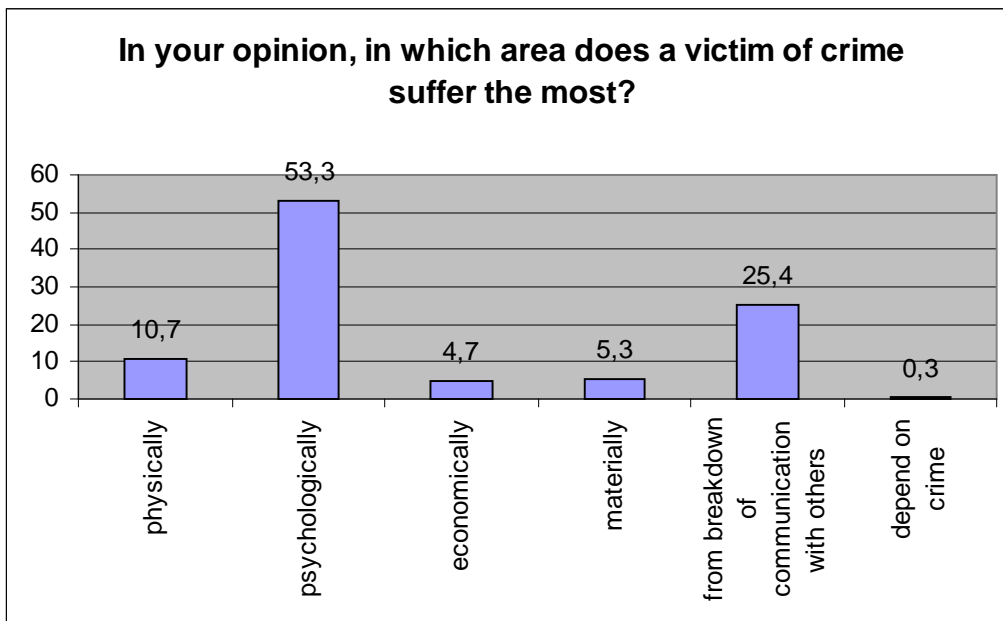


Figure 3: *In your opinion which area does a victim of crime suffer the most*

The majority of students, 53.3% responded “psychologically”, 25.4 % say that the worse consequence for the victim is about breakdown of communication of others and the 10.7% think that

the physically consequences are most important after a traumatic experience.

- The question asked: how should you feel towards a victim of crime?

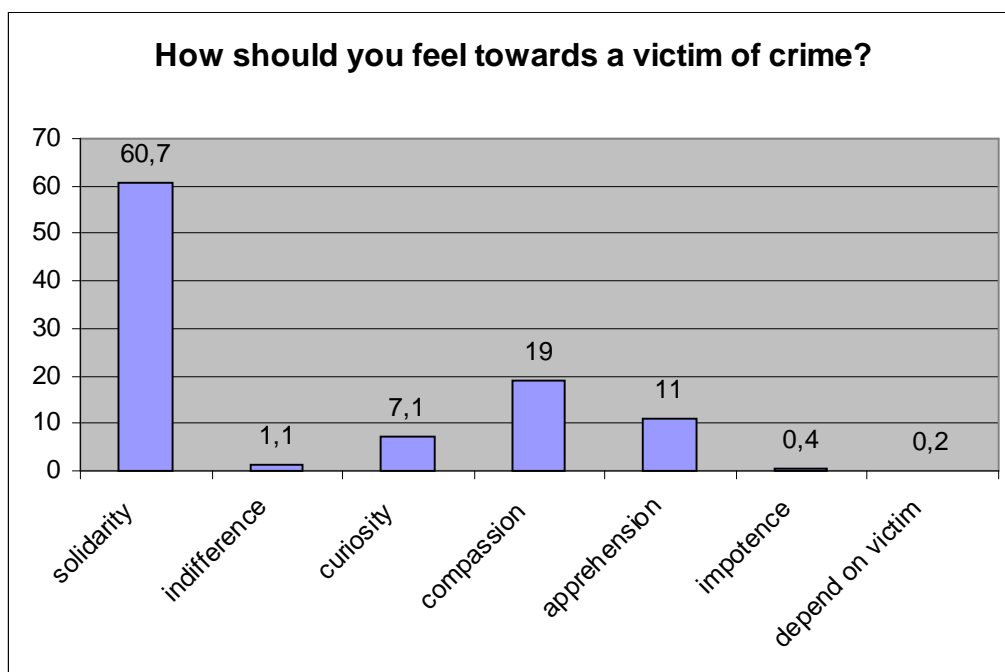


Figure 4: *How should you feel towards a victim of crime?*

The 60,7% of the students, as you can see on figure, responded “solidarity” and 19% think that the sentiment of compassion is the first sensation about victim of crime.

5. The question asked: in your opinion how does the justice system treat a victim of crime in comparison to the perpetrator of crime?

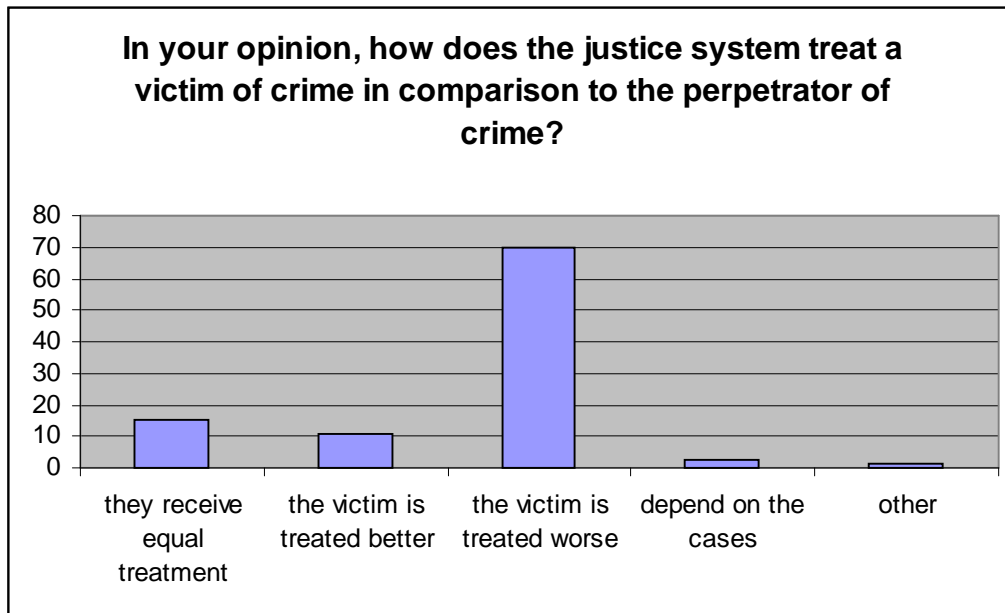


Figure 5: In your opinion how does the justice system treat a victim of crime in comparison to the perpetrator of crime?

According to the majority of the students 70.11%, the victim is treated worse.

In particular, I will analyse the student’s opinion about victim support. In this case, the question was: “To help the victims of crime, help centres

are being set up in various cities. Do you agree that these services are increasing in number?”

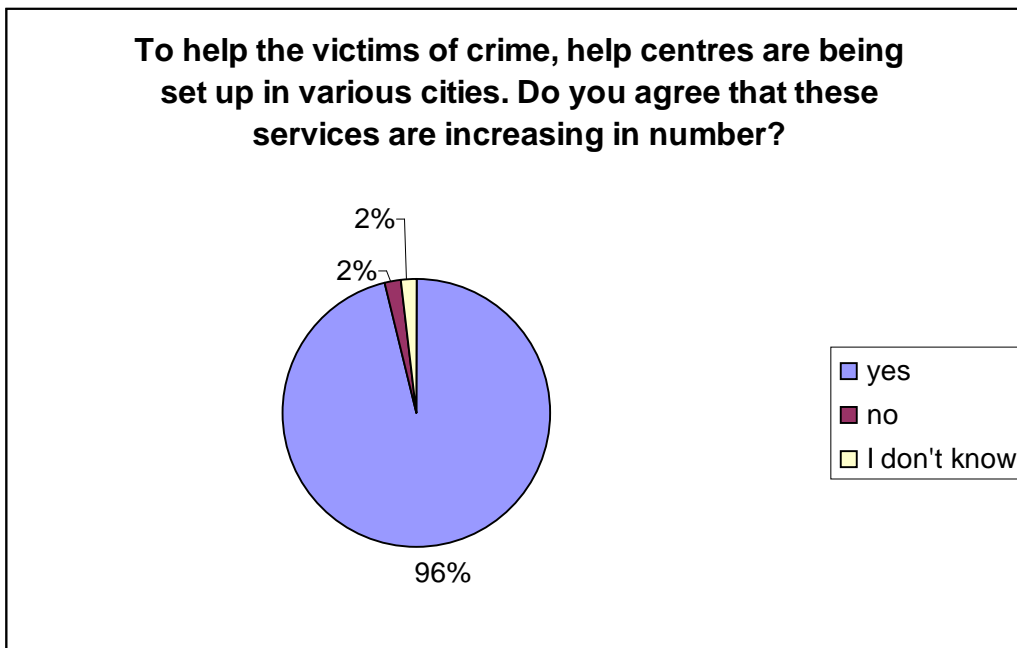


Figure 6: *To help the victims of crime, help centres are being set up in various cities. Do you agree that these services are increasing in number?*

As you can see – a huge majority said yes (96%). We then asked those who said YES to qualify their answer and say what the service actually does, their answers, as you can see in the

following pie chart, were that the help centres: a) spread the idea that help is available; b) are an indication of civil welfare; c) provide free help; d) help reduce crime; e) didn't respond.

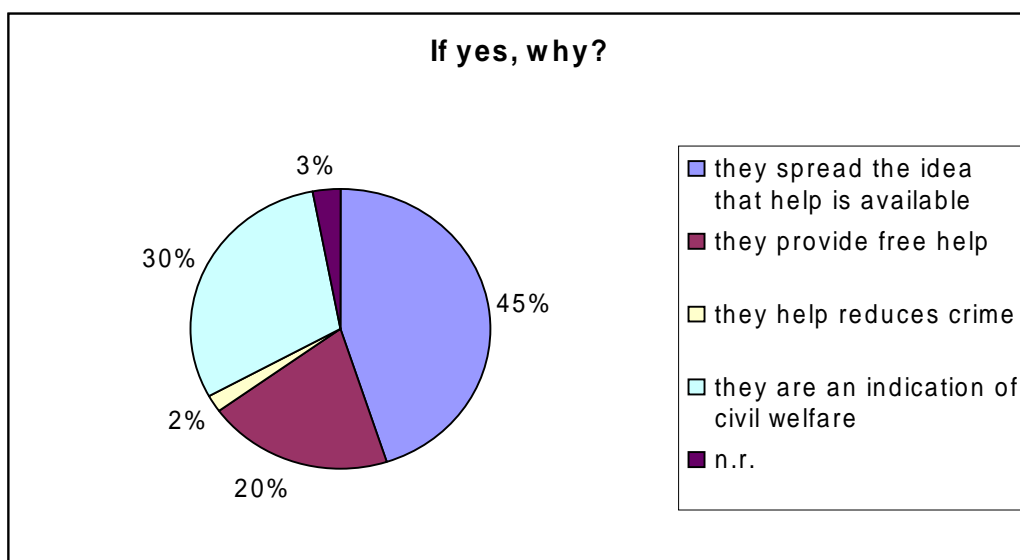


Figure 7: *If yes, why?*

We also asked those who said NO to qualify their answers. The students responded:

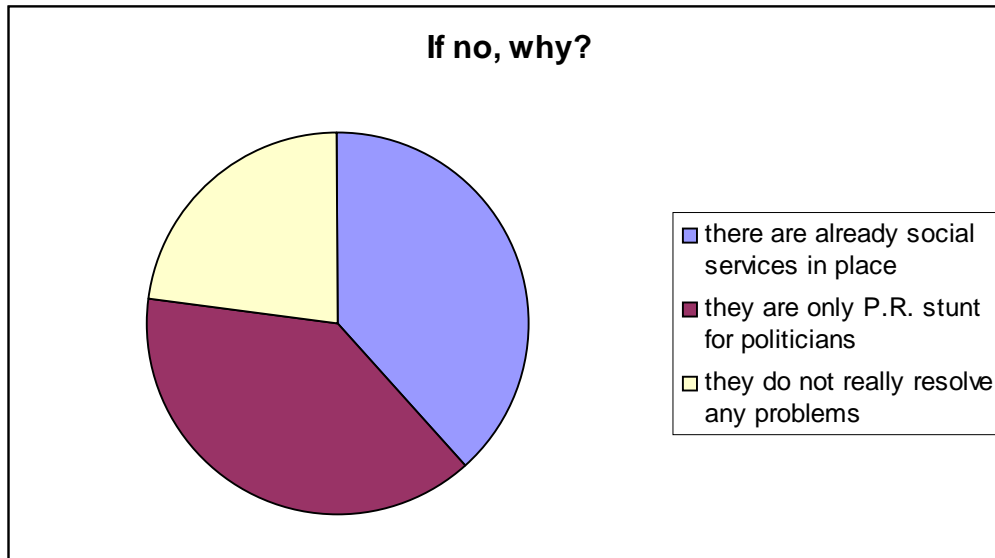


Figure 8: *If no, why?*

From this survey it emerged that 96% of all those questioned were in favour of the creation of a centres for victim support. Because all of the students questioned were familiar with this particular subject matter; the results are probably more favourable (there is a higher percentage in favour) than average.

It must be stated that the same questions were asked to a larger number of non – University students with the same favourable results.

Furthermore, with respect to victim support, public awareness today is much higher than 20 years ago.

2. The Victim Support Centres.

In this research, the workers of Victim Support have been interviewed, too. There are centres of victim support throughout Bologna.

After a necessary selection process, taking into consideration the numbers, the centres can be divided into 2 sub categories: public services and private services.

2.1.Public Services.

1. Fondazione Emiliano-Romagnola per le vittime di reato (the Emilia-Romagna foundation for the victims of crime);
2. Il Faro, centro specialistico provinciale per gli abusi all'infanzia (The Lighthouse, local centre specialising in child abuse);
3. Servizi Sociali per minori e famiglie del Comune (Social Services for youth and local families);
4. Ufficio Sicurezza del Comune (Local security/safety office);
5. Ufficio vittime dell'usura e del racket presso la Prefettura – Ufficio Territoriale del Governo – (The office for victims of organised crime).

For example, the Emilia-Romagna foundation for the victim of crime was created in 2004 and deals with serious crime – usually when the victim has been physically injured in same way. Their help is always in the form of economic support.

2.2. Private services.

1. Associazione Familiari Vittime Della Strage 2 Agosto 1980 (The Association for victims of terrorism);
2. Associazione Familiari Vittime Uno Bianca (The Association for the victims of “The White Fiat Uno” – armed attacks in Italy in the 90’s where the perpetrators used a White Fiat Uno);
3. Associazione Prima contro il mobbing e lo stress psicosociale (The First Association against physical and psychological bullying);
4. Casa delle Donne per non subire violenza (Women’s refuge for victims of domestic violence);
5. Codici Onlus: contro l’usura e il racket (for victims of organised crime)
6. Gruppo giustizia UDI (Women’s refuge for victims of domestic violence);
7. Il Pettiroso: per il recupero della tossicodipendenza (drug rehabilitation centre);
8. MIT, movimento italiano transessuali: contro la stigmatizzazione della diversità (Movement for Italian Transsexuals: against the stigmatisation of marginal groups).

For example, with the Casa delle Donne, they deal with domestic violence against women.

The main difference between the public and private sectors is that whereas the staff in the public bodies are full-time paid professionals, in the private sector most of the staff are voluntary.

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The workers in the centres were asked a variety of work related questions, for example, the various difficulties they faced, the types of treatment given, public and private partnerships, the definition of victim, etc.

3. Conclusions.

From their responses the following problem areas emerged:

1. The lack of financial support;
2. The inconsistent (porous) network;
3. The lack of training for staff;
4. Lack of risk management for the victims of crime.

The unsettled question is about the definition of the victim, in fact, most of the subjects interviewed stated that the present ‘legal’ definition of a victim of crime – (that is) i.e. “a victim of physical abuse” – is inadequate as it doesn’t take into consideration any psychological abuse which is also very important.

There is not only no formal support for the victim (on a psychological level) but also none on a one to one level. The professionals dealing with the victim’s case do not have adequate professional training to help the victim come to terms with the psychological after effects of the crime.

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