



## IACP LAW ENFORCEMENT POLICY CENTER

# Response to Victims of Crime

### Concepts and Issues Paper

Updated: August 2018

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Purpose of the Document

This paper is designed to accompany the *Model Policy on Response to Victims of Crime* established by the IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center. It provides essential background material and supporting documentation on the developmental philosophy and implementation requirements of the model policy. This material will be of value to law enforcement executives in their efforts to tailor the model to the requirements and circumstances of their communities and their law enforcement agencies.

### B. Background

For most crime victims, law enforcement represents the gateway to the criminal justice system, and their perceptions of the system can be influenced by the manner in which they are treated at the first response and during the follow-up investigation and subsequent adjudication. How law enforcement agencies treat victims is a direct reflection of their mission, philosophy, and core values. Organizations that place a high priority on addressing the needs of victims of crime are likely to build greater community confidence, increase crime reporting, leverage significant resources through expanded collaborations with community partners, reduce crime, and contribute positively to the recovery and healing of victims of crime. This philosophy of policing and the core values of the agency must be implemented by individual members in their response to every victim of crime.

Historically, law enforcement has been an integral element of the criminal justice system's efforts to address the needs of crime victims. The first police-based victim service programs were established in the 1970s, leading the

way for those that exist today. Additional recommendations followed on how to improve the treatment of crime victims by law enforcement including training programs to increase sensitivity and awareness about victim issues; timely return of property; information regarding case status; and investigation of victim and witness reports of threats or intimidation.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, further discussions involving law enforcement, victim, and service providers concluded that crime victims want and need specific returns from the criminal justice system. These include safety from perpetrators and re-victimization; access to services and participation in the criminal justice system; information, verbal and written, about support services; continuity with reference to standard of service among responders; justice achieved by holding perpetrators accountable; and finally, voice—the ability to speak out and be heard about their issues and concerns.<sup>2</sup>

Following the establishment of these basic needs and rights of crime victims, in recent years, international efforts to support refugees and victims of human trafficking and international terrorism have emerged, led by the International Rescue Committee, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Crime Programme, and Victim Support Europe (VSE).

***Crime Victims in the United States.*** In 1984, the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) was passed and led to over 32,000 laws defining and protecting victim rights at

<sup>1</sup> See the *Final Report of the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime*, <https://ojp.gov/ovc/publications/presdntstskforcprpt/87299.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> IACP, *What Do Victims Want? Effective Strategies to Achieve Justice for Victims of Crime* (Alexandria, VA: 2000), <http://www.theiacp.org/portals/0/pdfs/WhatDoVictimsWantSummitReport.pdf>.

the local, state, and national levels.<sup>3</sup> Among these are the rights of a crime victim to be treated with fairness, dignity, and respect. Others include the right to be informed and present throughout the criminal justice process; the right to resources and referrals; the right to seek restitution; and the right to be reasonably protected from the accused. More recently, the Crime Victims' Rights Act (CVRA) provides additional rights for victims, some of which apply even before a defendant is charged with a crime.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to outlining victims' rights, VOCA created the Crime Victims Fund fueled exclusively by penalties, fines, and forfeitures from federal criminals to be used as the funding source for direct compensation to victims and victim assistance resources.<sup>5</sup> The Fund helps victims, victim service providers and advocates, and policy makers to join successfully with law enforcement and other criminal justice agencies in creating policies and programs to promote crime victims' rights and enhance services for their needs.

In recent years, the field of victims' rights has expanded greatly, to include an increased focus on providing victims with access to services. For example, in the United States, a project called Vision 21 offered increased funding to broaden the reach of federal victims' services to those individuals who are victimized abroad, as well as for American Indian and Alaska native crime victims, who have been historically underserved.

***United States Victim Immigration Relief.*** In October 2000, the U.S. Congress passed the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, which created U and T visas. The U visa is available to immigrant victims of certain qualifying crimes, such as sexual exploitation, false imprisonment, and abduction, who have suffered substantial physical or mental abuse as a result of being a victim, have information about the criminal activity, and who are helpful in the investigation or prosecution of the crime.<sup>6</sup> T visas are intended for individuals who are victims of trafficking, comply with any reasonable request from a law enforcement agency for assistance in the investigation or prosecution of human trafficking, and can demonstrate that they would suffer extreme hardship

if they were removed from the United States.<sup>7</sup> In addition, victims of human trafficking may be eligible for temporary immigration status, referred to as continued presence, which allows them to remain in the United States because they are a potential witness.<sup>8</sup> Law enforcement agencies are a crucial part of the process for victims to obtain these types of immigration relief. Agencies are encouraged to refer to available resources on this topic from the Department of Homeland Security.

Congress created both visas to (1) strengthen the ability of law enforcement agencies to detect, investigate, and prosecute cases of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and other criminal activities; and (2) to protect immigrant victims of such activities. Lawmakers recognized that a victim's cooperation, assistance, and safety are essential to the effective detection, investigation, and prosecution of crimes. Both visa programs aim to encourage victims to report crime and participate in the various stages of the investigation. This process fosters increased trust between law enforcement agencies and the immigrant populations they serve. As a crime-fighting tool, both visa programs reinforce a law enforcement agency's commitment to hold offenders accountable, promote victim safety, enhance protection, and assist victims in their recovery from trauma as a result of criminal activity. Without the temporary legal immigration status that both visa programs afford to some immigrant crime victims, the victims may be afraid to seek assistance from law enforcement and instead risk continued exploitation and ongoing victimization.<sup>9</sup>

## II. ISSUES

### A. Victims of Crime

Crime has a profound and sometimes devastating impact on victims, their families, and communities. As targets of criminal activity, victims may experience physical, financial, social, spiritual, and emotional anguish associated with the crime inflicted upon them. Crime types are no measure of the complications surrounding the challenges of victimization, although it is generally

<sup>3</sup> Crime Victims Fund, 42 U.S.C. § 10601 (2010).

<sup>4</sup> See Crime Victims' Rights, 18 U.S.C. § 3771, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2011-title18/pdf/USCODE-2011-title18-partII-chap237-sec3771.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), "Crime Victim Compensation Program Initiative," OVC Fact Sheet, July 2016, <https://www.ovc.gov/pubs/crime-victim-compensation-program-initiative-factsheet-508.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), "Victims of Criminal Activity: U Nonimmigrant Status," <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/victims-human-trafficking-other-crimes/victims-criminal-activity-u-nonimmigrant-status/victims-criminal-activity-u-nonimmigrant-status>.

<sup>7</sup> USCIS, "Victims of Human Trafficking: T Nonimmigrant Status," <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/victims-human-trafficking-other-crimes/victims-human-trafficking-t-nonimmigrant-status>.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Homeland Security (DHS), *Information for Law Enforcement Officials: Immigration Relief for Victims of Human Trafficking and Other Crimes*, <https://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/blue-campaign/ht-information-for-law-enforcement-officials-immigration-relief-for-victims-of-human-trafficking.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> DHS, *U and T Visa Law Enforcement Resource Guide for Federal, State, Local, Tribal and Territorial Law Enforcement, Prosecutors, Judges, and Other Government Agencies* (2016), [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/U-and-T-Visa-Law-Enforcement-Resource-Guide\\_1.4.16.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/U-and-T-Visa-Law-Enforcement-Resource-Guide_1.4.16.pdf).

assumed that victims of violent crimes have a more difficult time coping than property crime victims.

Victim behaviors stemming from criminal victimization can be complex and are often influenced by a number of factors such as previous victimization, trauma, nature and duration of the crime, age, gender, response from service providers, and the level of support and reactions from others (e.g., friends, family, and religious leaders). These behaviors can unfold over time, are not easily understood, and can be challenging for responders including law enforcement.

Crime victims may have shifting reactions that vary from immediate to long term. In addition, victims of each unique crime category have a set of specific needs. The commonality that runs throughout is that the same degree and quality of service and support is required to address these needs.

Physical injuries, emotional damage, trauma, financial impacts and limitations, spiritual conflicts, and social isolation, either separately or combined, can create devastating impacts on victims. Law enforcement and other agencies should consider these impacts when developing specialized programs, instituting agencywide support efforts, and fostering collaborations among community groups to address crime victim needs and services.

## B. Crime Victims and Trauma

Trauma is defined as an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.<sup>10</sup>

Trauma is unique in its extent, type, duration, recurrence potential, and impact. Individuals who are subjected or exposed to crime often experience reactions such as shock, terror, fear, numbness, helplessness, and disbelief that the event has occurred. Feelings of loss of safety, privacy, trust, intimacy, and self-esteem may all related to the impact of trauma.

Ordinary coping skills likely will not be sufficient to overcome the impact of the trauma. As a consequence, psychological damage is more likely to create long-lasting issues and problems for crime victims. As such, understanding that criminal victimization leaves its mark on victims in ways that can remain for a lifetime is the first step in providing tailored services for the needs of victims.

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<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach* (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014), <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4884/SMA14-4884.pdf>.

## C. Trauma-Informed Approach

In response to the effects of trauma on victims, agencies should encourage a trauma-informed approach. Such an approach is defined as “[a] program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed *realizes* the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; *recognizes* the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and *responds* by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively *resist re-traumatization*.”(emphasis in the original)<sup>11</sup>

This approach places the priority “on the victim’s safety and security and on safeguarding against policies and practices that may inadvertently traumatize victims.”<sup>12</sup> Benefits of trauma-informed practices include more effective interviews and potentially increased cooperation with law enforcement.

A trauma-informed agency is composed of people who realize and understand how trauma impacts communities and individuals who interact with the criminal justice system. It responds to victims by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into its policies, procedures, and practices, proactively avoiding retraumatization. As previously discussed, individuals vary greatly in their different reactions to trauma, depending on their prior history of trauma and victimization, support systems, history of mental illness or substance use, and previous interactions with law enforcement. These factors may include the immediate effects of adrenaline under stress after engaging a “fight or flight” response, which may impact attention and concentration, the ability to recall details of an event accurately, and avoidance or inappropriate behavior in interpersonal interactions. Officers who are trained in trauma-informed approaches recognize these trauma reactions and respond with patience, knowledge, and skill in facilitating a potential path for increased safety and decreasing the likelihood of re-traumatization. Agencies should consider adopting the use of the “RISC” (Respect, Information, Safety, and Choice) response strategy, whenever possible. This includes treating people with respect, providing information and increased communication, avoiding triggering and aggressive styles of communication, promoting safety as the overall goal of intervention, and providing the victim with choices, even if small, whenever feasible.

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<sup>11</sup> HHS, *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> OVC, Training and Technical Assistance Center, “Using a Trauma-Informed Approach,” <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/4-supporting-victims/41-using-a-trauma-informed-approach>.

Where possible, agencies should seek to mitigate harm by establishing procedures that assist or protect victims and establish physical and psychological safety. This may include physically separating victims from offenders, engaging the assistance of victim advocates, and not responding appropriately to children who have been abandoned.<sup>13</sup> Trauma-informed interviewing techniques should be utilized, as traditional interrogation tactics are not effective with victims and can negatively impact or even re-traumatize them. However, agency policies and procedures should take into account the fact that recommended trauma-informed interview techniques vary greatly based on the type of crime the victim has experienced. For instance, human trafficking victims should be approached in a manner that is different from domestic violence victims. Therefore, agencies are encouraged to develop and train officers on the appropriate guidelines for interacting with and interviewing specific types of crime victims.

#### **D. Crime Victims' Needs**

In 2009, the IACP released a national strategy and resource toolkit to assist law enforcement in their response to victims. The *Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims* (ELERV) resources are designed to educate law enforcement agencies on why improving their response to victims can be both beneficial and challenging, as well as to assist agencies in implementing necessary changes. One key piece to the ELERV initiative was to continue to bring focus on the unique needs of crime victims. The following seven critical needs of crime victims were first identified at the 1999 IACP National Policy Summit on Victims of Crime:

**Safety.** This need is identified as an important consideration in the wake and aftermath of a crime. Crime victims need protection from further intimidation, harassment, and harm. The consequences of the crime often affect the victim's sense of safety, fearing that if it happened once it can happen again. Law enforcement agencies have the ability to provide a reasonable level of protection to crime victims. When assured that their safety concerns are legitimate and will be respected as such, crime victims are more likely to develop trust and cooperate more readily with the investigation.

**Support.** Once an individual becomes a crime victim, he or she is in need of support from the criminal justice system and victim service providers. Law enforcement and other victim responders must have the ability to communicate in a nonthreatening, compassionate, informed manner to help victims participate in the justice

process. Laws may require that law enforcement support victims by informing them of their rights in the immediate aftermath of a crime. By providing this information, law enforcement agencies can clearly communicate early in the process that victims have rights and are important. Support as a basic need affords victims a valuable opportunity to take an active role in cooperating and working with law enforcement to hold perpetrators accountable.

**Information.** Crime victims have a need and a right to be informed of the status of their investigations and the general workings of the criminal justice system. Crime victims should be provided with realistic expectations of the speed, breadth, and depth of the investigation. Many crime victims are unfamiliar with these realities prior to the crime. After experiencing an unsettling, unsolicited life experience, crime victims may approach the system with unrealistic expectations, along with a desire to gather as much information as possible about their cases. Victims want and need to be kept informed about the investigation, notified about court proceedings, and provided the name and contact information for the investigator assigned to the case.

**Access.** Victims of crime must have access to the various elements of the justice system and support services that are available to assist them in forms and a language clearly understood by them. Those with identifiable special needs, developmental and physical impairments, language limitations, diminished competency, mental illness, or cultural dissimilarities must have available avenues to allow them the opportunity to participate in the system.

**Continuity.** Continuity in service delivery throughout the justice system is an essential element for crime victims. Responses from various sources along the continuum of support should reflect consistent and correct information, high-quality service, and a commitment to providing assistance. Continuity can be achieved only through effective collaborations with service providers and other criminal justice professionals who are dedicated to the same goal.

**Voice.** Victims' voices have traditionally been the most articulate and lasting in helping law enforcement and other victim service responders understand, respect, and address victim concerns. The benefits are twofold: victims need to know not only that they are valued, but that their experiences are being used to help ensure that others are not subjected to criminal acts. Law enforcement can empower victims by encouraging them to speak out and in turn listen to their issues and concerns.

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<sup>13</sup> See IACP's Youth-Focused Policing webpage ([www.iacpyouth.org](http://www.iacpyouth.org)) for additional resources on interacting with children exposed to violence.

**Justice.** Justice is best achieved when law enforcement professionals, victims, and various other elements along the victim support continuum combine efforts to convict the offender and help assist the victim in the healing process.<sup>14</sup>

## E. Necessary Skills

In order to build an effective victim response, law enforcement agencies should develop and integrate necessary skills and professional attitudes throughout all operational levels. Sworn and civilian employees should become well-informed regarding the role that victims play in the criminal justice process, the applicable laws regarding victim rights, and the importance and benefits of treating victims with dignity and respect.

It is essential that agency policies and procedures address the dynamics of trauma and its impact on victims and on those who serve them. Sworn and civilian employees themselves are oftentimes exposed to traumatic events and dangerous situations, and, in the interest of employee safety and welfare, there should be training designed to heighten awareness about vicarious trauma, personal safety, and burnout, as well as awareness of the support mechanisms in place to promote employee wellness.

Four necessary organizational and individual sets of values and skills have been identified to assist agencies and individuals to ensure that their responses to crime victims are effective.

**Effective communication skills** are the trademark for successful interactions and relationships with victims. Most crime victims are aware of nonverbal gestures such as facial expressions, body movements, and posture that may signal when officers are insincere and untrustworthy. Being mindful of voice volume, quality, and tone can help officers to be perceived in a positive light, thereby encouraging victims to turn to the justice system and other community resources for support.

**Empathy** is the ability to share another's feelings. This is an important skill for law enforcement personnel as it allows them to understand why victim issues and concerns are important. Empathy can be conveyed by actively listening to and hearing crime victims, recognizing that they are in a vulnerable situation, and that what is being reflected is often the result of the physical and psychological trauma associated with victimization. Once understood, the victim experience can alter the response by law enforcement. Empathy by agency employees demonstrates a sincere desire to connect victims with appropriate resources and ensure that the continuum of support is evident throughout all levels of the agency.

**Professionalism and integrity** must be ingrained in the policy, process, and culture of an agency. These skills are influenced by the agency's mission, vision, values, and leadership. Crime victims may be extremely sensitive and can quickly discern when these necessary elements are not in place. As customers of law enforcement service, it is imperative that victims feel confident that professional conduct and integrity are values that permeate the agency.

**Honesty and confidentiality** are measures of integrity. Integrity in the law enforcement response to crime victims occurs with making sound judgment calls, promoting respect and regard for the privacy and dignity of every victim, and consistently evaluating behaviors and methods to ensure compliance with high standards of conduct.

## F. Challenges and Effective Strategies

The role of law enforcement in traditional policing is focused on the prevention of crime and the protection of the public. Changing the philosophical approach to working with crime victims and viewing them as more than just a tool to help identify and prosecute criminals requires strong commitment by the leadership within law enforcement organizations. Clearly communicating the high priority placed on victim response will ensure adherence to these principles by agency employees. It is critical that all employees have clearly delineated roles when working with victims. These roles must be defined by policy, as well as job descriptions, and supported by recruiting; training; and individual, divisional, and overall agency evaluation practices.

Competing priorities and diminishing budgets present law enforcement organizations with yet another challenge. Enhancing services to crime victims can be successfully integrated into existing investigative and support functions with little additional resources. Investing in enhanced victim response will cause victims to feel safer and, consequently, be more willing to cooperate in the investigative process. For instance, several agencies in Great Britain and the United States have initiated a strategy of assigning a trained investigator to the families of homicide victims. These family liaison officers (FLOs) collect background information that is valuable to the criminal investigation, while providing a personal link between the family members and the criminal justice system. The use of volunteers in the victim service function of law enforcement agencies is also another promising practice.<sup>15</sup>

Law enforcement agencies should incorporate emerging technologies into their victim response strategies. Computer-assisted records management systems allow

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<sup>14</sup> See *What Do Victims Want? Effective Strategies to Achieve Justice for Victims of Crime*.

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<sup>15</sup> Additional information on the use of volunteers can be found on IACP's Volunteers in Police Service webpage (<http://www.theiacp.org/VIPS>).

investigators and supervisors to search case activity chronologically and topically, tracking the number and the nature of contacts between crime victims and law enforcement. Internet-based notification systems, such as the VINE system (Victim Information and Notification Everyday) can act as a force multiplier, assisting agencies with limited staff to notify victims about changes in probation and incarceration status of offenders.

Collaborating with community-based victim service organizations to better understand and serve the needs of crime victims should become a readily accepted practice. Providing specialized training to help officers interact within the multicultural range of their communities will ensure culturally competent services, which can otherwise be a challenge.

The IACP has developed a comprehensive strategy designed to assist law enforcement agencies to integrate victim response into their mission. The Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims Strategy provides law enforcement leaders with concepts, implementation steps, victim-related resources and training aids developed to help agencies chart a course to a more effective and embedded victim assistance philosophy.<sup>16</sup>

### III. PROCEDURES

#### A. Responding to Victims

When law enforcement responds to victims of crime, officers are tasked with balancing multiple interests at once. These include minimizing any remaining threat, preserving evidence, and recording details of the crime. However, it is important that officers maintain a victim-centered mind-set while conducting their usual duties when responding to a crime.

First and foremost, officers should ensure that the victim is safe and removed from immediate danger. If anyone is injured, officers should render first aid until summoned emergency medical services arrive. Once the scene is stable, officers should turn their attention to the victim and develop a supportive presence, compassionately assuring the victim that the immediate danger has passed. Officers should speak to the victim with a calm voice and avoid using harsh language or unnecessary commands.

A victim who is displaying a strong emotional reaction to the events of the crime should not be left alone. Victims may react in a variety of ways, including going into shock, experiencing a mental health crisis, or engaging in irrational or dangerous conduct (e.g., trying to run after an ambulance carrying an injured loved one). If officers are not able to remain with a victim, family members,

neighbors, or a community assistance provider should be summoned. Chaplains or religious personnel serve well in this role to support the victim and to organize community members to assist with other tasks. Whenever possible, the victim should not be left alone.

An individual may be a victim even if a crime is not perpetrated directly against them. For instance, people may feel victimized if their property is damaged or if their home is burglarized. These crimes affect a person's sense of safety and can be just as traumatic as being physically assaulted. When collecting evidence or information from a victim, officers should be sensitive to the feelings of violation the person may be experiencing. The use of a trauma-informed approach to ascertain what happened and what the victim knows will be mutually beneficial to the officer and the victim. As a part of a trauma-informed response, officers must consider the method, manner, location, and timing of a victim interview in an effort to prevent re-traumatization. A calm, supportive interview atmosphere should be provided whenever possible, although this might not be possible if the scene is unstable or if the safety of the victim, officers, or others is still a concern.

As soon as possible, officers should provide the victim with applicable resources to include the victims' rights laws for the respective jurisdiction, including those that may apply to domestic or family violence situations. Documentation of victim services providers, shelters, and crime victim compensation should also be provided. Contact information for community providers who are not present on scene is paramount to ensure a continuity of services from law enforcement to victim services professionals.

It is critical to understand that an officer's obligation to a victim does not end once the scene is cleared. Agencies should be committed to educating victims on the investigation process and what may expect. This should include who will follow-up with the victim, whether the victim can expect to be contacted, and how the victim can contact the agency if he or she is threatened or intimidated by any person or if any new information is learned. The reporting officer is expected to document in his or her report that all necessary information and referrals were communicated to the victim.

Using a trauma-informed approach, an initial follow-up with the victim should be conducted as soon as practical to relay updates involving the case and to determine whether the victim has any new information. The investigating officer should continue to make reasonable efforts to connect the victim with services.

In addition to the initial follow-up, officers assigned to the criminal investigation should regularly update the victim about the progress of his or her case. Sometimes

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<sup>16</sup> The entire strategy package can be accessed online at <http://www.responsetovictims.org>.

it may be that the officer has nothing new to report. It is imperative that the officer does not express frustration when being contacted by the victim and should not intimate that it is not his or her responsibility to respond to inquiries by the victim. The officer should continue to share available information even if he or she is reiterating information previously provided to the victim.

In the event that an arrest is made in the victim's case, the investigating officer should contact the victim to provide information concerning the arrest, the bail status of the suspect, an overview of the court process, and a specific point of contact in the prosecutor's office. Changes in bail status should be immediately communicated, as they could mean that the suspect is returning to the community.

## **B. Employee Wellness**

Law enforcement agencies should recognize that the nature of police work can negatively impact the mental health of employees and their families. Public safety employees are exposed to the information of countless crimes and to the victims of those crimes. Vicarious trauma is defined as a permanent change that occurs within a person who has provided empathetic assistance to victims and typically develops over a period of time involved in helping, listening, and consoling victims. Vicarious trauma is usually a response to the accumulation of being exposed to another's pain. While the terms vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue may be used interchangeably, compassion fatigue is often the result of vicarious trauma. Compassion fatigue refers to the profound emotional and physical responses that takes place when employees who regularly interact with victims are unable to recover.

If law enforcement employees have contact with victims who have experienced a traumatic event, they can be exposed indirectly to the trauma. Vicarious trauma can be extremely pervasive, impacting all areas of a person's life including personality, attitude, character, and even physical fitness. In some instances, belief systems are also challenged.

Post-traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue can manifest differently in each person. Symptoms range from being physically exhausted to having difficulty sleeping. Individuals may experience a decrease in sex drive, emotional exhaustion, reduced empathy, and low patience or tolerance. Physically, they may have headaches, migraines, digestive issues, nausea, aches, and feel sick more often. Psychologically, they may experience intrusive imagery, often related to the crime or to the victims' stories. They can become hypersensitive and doubt their abilities to help victims, or become hyper vigilant, overly suspicious, or constantly on edge. Some individuals experience fear. They can feel helpless, experience feelings of depression or suicidal thinking,

and have a diminished sense of satisfaction in their career. They might stop engaging in activities that used to bring pleasure, miss more work in an attempt to avoid interacting with victims, and display a marked decrease in motivation. In some cases, these employees may ask to change positions or leave the field altogether.

Agencies should be prepared to address these issues, with both preventative and interventive measures. Policies and procedures should be developed regarding psychological support, both on a regular basis, as well as following a critical incident.<sup>17</sup> Employees should be made aware of available employee mental health services, such as employee assistance, chaplain, or peer support programs. These programs are intended to normalize reactions, prevent delayed stress symptoms, and help the employees and their families deal with the negative responses that may be experienced caused by the nature of their work. Some remedies for compassion fatigue or vicarious trauma include providing the employees with time away from work through accrued leave or transfer to a less stressful position. Regular training on identifying employees in need of care; reducing stress; providing trauma response and recovery; recognizing vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress; and improving resiliency should also be provided on a regular basis to all employees.

## **C. Resources and Referrals<sup>18</sup>**

Crime victims are supported by a broad network of public and private organizations that offer a wide range of services and support. These resources have a specific mission and staff possessing advanced training that can facilitate victim recovery and offer focused assistance as the victim's case progresses through the justice system. Agency employees, from communications personnel to executives, should become familiar with local, state, and federal resources for victim assistance.

Written information should be developed to inform victims of their rights, explain the criminal justice system, and provide information about available resources. Informational brochures and literature must be written in simple terms and in languages consistent with the makeup of the agency's community. Special care should be taken to inform victims who have physical, mental, or emotional impairments to ensure that information is being adequately communicated.

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<sup>17</sup> See the IACP *Model Policies and Concepts & Issues Papers on Critical Incident Stress Management and Employee Mental Health Services* available at [http://www.theiacp.org/model-policy/model\\_policy/critical-incident-stress-management/](http://www.theiacp.org/model-policy/model_policy/critical-incident-stress-management/) and [http://www.theiacp.org/model-policy/employee-mental-health-services/](http://www.theiacp.org/model-policy/model_policy/employee-mental-health-services/).

<sup>18</sup> For resources available from IACP, visit [www.responsetovictims.org](http://www.responsetovictims.org), <http://www.theiacp.org/victimcompensation>, <http://www.iacpyouth.org>, and <http://www.iacp.org/violence-against-women>.

Strong relationships built on mutual trust and understanding should be forged between law enforcement and victim service providers. The primary concern of victim service providers and advocacy organizations is the well-being and needs of crime victims. From their point of view, successful investigations and prosecutions, while important, may play a secondary role to victims' needs. Law enforcement should recognize and respect these concerns when working with victim service organizations.

#### **D. Training**

Training regarding victim issues and concerns must be mandatory for all employees. Ideally, training on this topic should take place during the orientation program for new employees and should cover the agency's internal policies related to working with victims. This initial training should be supplemented by regular refresher training. When employees are fully informed and understand the importance of providing quality responses and services to victims, measurable success will follow.

A number of training programs are available to law enforcement agencies that detail areas for training such as victims' rights, applicable legal concerns, effects of trauma on crime victims, trauma-informed practices, cultural diversity, impact of crime, communicating effectively with victims, collaboration with community agencies, integrating the needs of victims into the investigation process, and ethics regarding victim assistance. Part of the training for agency employees should include self-care, understanding their own behavioral health and wellness, and the impact of vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue.

Every effort has been made to ensure that this document incorporates the most current information and contemporary professional judgment on this issue. Readers outside of the United States should note that, while this document promotes procedures reflective of a democratic society, its legal basis follows United States Supreme Court rulings and other federal laws and statutes.

Law enforcement administrators should be cautioned that no "model" policy can meet all the needs of any given law enforcement agency. Each law enforcement agency operates in a unique environment of court rulings, state laws, local ordinances, regulations, judicial and administrative decisions and collective bargaining agreements that must be considered, and should therefore consult its legal advisor before implementing any policy.

This document is not intended to be a national standard.

#### **E. IACP Resources**

- Child Sex Trafficking: Tools for Law Enforcement  
<http://www.theiacp.org/childtrafficking>
- Enhancing Law Enforcement Human Trafficking Task Force Operations  
<http://www.theiacp.org/humantrafficking>
- Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Children Exposed to Violence  
<http://www.theiacp.org/childrenexposedtoviolence>
- Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims  
<http://www.responsetovictims.org>
- IACP Violence Against Women Projects  
<http://www.theiacp.org/violence-against-women>
- IACP Youth Focused Policing Resource Center  
<http://www.iacpyouth.org>
- Identifying and Preventing Gender Bias in Law Enforcement Response to Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence  
<http://www.theiacp.org/gender-bias>
- Law Enforcement and the Communities They Serve: Supporting Collective Healing in the Wake of Harm  
<http://www.theiacp.org/collectivehealing>
- Law Enforcement's Role in Supporting Victims Access to Compensation  
<http://www.theiacp.org/victimcompensation>
- Safeguarding Children of Arrest Parents  
<http://www.theiacp.org/cap>

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