EXPLORING AND RESPONDING TO THE IMPACT OF VICTIMIZATION IN COMMUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

This project came to being after the community of one staff member was tragically struck by a double homicide. Our organization was informed about the confusion, sadness, and responses of members of this small community in their reaction to what had happened in their community. The notion of the community as a victim was not one that Victims of Violence had discussed in detail previously and we began to wonder what, if any, resources were available to the community at large. Preliminary research and outreach to stakeholders informed us there was a need for information specific to those who had been indirectly victimized by a violent crime – both in dealing with their own trauma and in supporting those who were directly victimized. We received positive feedback from both stakeholders and victims who felt resources for indirect victims were both important and necessary.

Through our outreach to both stakeholders and victims, we have established opinions from across the country on the impacts felt by a community following a violent crime, services available to the community, best practices and impediments to serving the community at large. We were able to receive input from stakeholders in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. We also received input from direct victims about their community's experience following their case. While there was no consensus on all issues, there were common themes in many of the opinions voiced by the participants.

In preparing this report, we were met by many obstacles to our primary research. Many of those contacted as a part of our outreach simply would not respond to emails or telephone calls, in particular government representatives. Several stakeholders who agreed to participate in our survey did not return their answers and failed to respond to follow-ups. Despite our efforts to include input from each province and territory, we were unable to elicit responses in all areas. We also found that in some areas contact information, such as emails published on government websites, were not functional. For example, in Nunavut where there is a single government department to deal with community justice, emails were not functional and telephone messages went unreturned. Language barriers were present in Quebec where service providers who claim to offer services in English were not able to respond to our English survey. In some cases, we were met with bureaucratic policies which prevented employees from answering our questions. These obstacles were very worrisome to us as an organization who advocates for victims of violent crime. If we are unable to be assisted as professionals, how can we be sure victims are not being treated in a similar manner?

In terms of our secondary research, we were unable to find Canadian research to substantiate or dispute many of our findings. This was not unexpected as the community as a victim has not been widely studied in Canada. While efforts were made to include data specific to Canada, much of the academic literature was drawn from American and Australian legal

experiences. Work from the United States in the area of trauma and crisis points to the importance of viewing the community as a whole when addressing recovery.

Just prior to our research phase beginning in August of 2015, The *Canadian Victims Bill of Rights* came into force. This brought with it several important changes to the criminal justice system in Canada including the acknowledgement of harm done to the community as a sentencing objective under the *Criminal Code* through a community impact statement (CIS) and providing a standard statement form to ensure consistency. At the time of reporting, the CIS had not been utilized in any of the jurisdictions we surveyed. Some provinces have yet to update their resources to include specific information on completing and submitting a CIS in their jurisdiction.

IMPACTS ON THE COMMUNITY FOLLOWING A VIOLENT CRIME

Personal Safety

The majority of stakeholders surveyed identified a decrease in personal safety as an effect of violent crime on a community – this may include incidents both inside and outside the home. Often the fear of further victimization has a large impact on communities with residents fearing for their safety whether or not they are in immediate danger. The fear of those not at personal risk is no less real and still may detract from the quality of life by adversely affecting social and economic well-being (Grabosky, 1995). In cases where there has not been an arrest, one service provider noted that community members feel especially vulnerable and insecure. There may be additional fear placed on community members by miscommunication or lack of information (see *Media* for further details).

The National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC) noted that emotional or physical harm suffered by a member of the community forces everyone to concede their vulnerability (2012). One service provider reiterated this, saying that community members often have a sense of invulnerability which is taken from them following a violent crime. Likewise, a victim shared the opinion that community members become fearful with the realization that bad things happen to good people. Prior to a violent crime, most communities retain the perception of safety – this changes significantly following the crime.

One victim commented that vulnerable individuals, such as the elderly, may be especially impacted by this fear causing them to feel unsafe on their streets. According to research into crimes against Canadian seniors, they are more likely than non-seniors to stay home due to the fear of crime (Gabor & Kiedrowski, 2009). Regardless of age, some residents may move or change their routines due to this insecurity (see *Economic Impacts* for further details).

Rural or small communities may be uniquely impacted by crime as there is often a familiarity with victims and their families that is not found in larger communities. One service provider noted that in small communities members are heavily impacted by violent crime due to the smallness of their communities. Becker noted that big events are defined differently in small communities (2012).

Economic Impacts

Many stakeholders reported witnessing an economic impact on communities following violent crimes. The ways in which this happens varies with region and the type of crime. One service provider mentioned the decrease in property values that may occur in a community following a violent crime – this may be as a result of people moving from the area as they fear for their safety. The work of Xie and McDowall stated that indirect victimization undermines neighbourhood viability as awareness of personal risk may motivate citizens to move (2008).

Stakeholders noted that businesses operating in a community where a violent crime has taken place may suffer from decreased traffic to their stores following the incident. Businesses may also see a change in the flow of customers to their location (e.g. avoiding doing business at night). Research shows that potential victimization is often sufficient enough to change people's behaviour (Xie & McDowall, 2008).

Other economic impacts may be felt by community members through the cost of social services: first responders, medical expenses, financial assistance, and ongoing criminal justice costs. This sentiment was shared by one victim who explained that crime costs every community, whether citizens know it or not, as medical expenses and various levels of the criminal justice system process are funded through taxes.

The economic cost of violent victimization is well supported by recent research. In 2014, a report was prepared for Department of Justice titled, *An Estimation of the Economic Impact of Violent Victimization in Canada, 2009*. The report analyzed five types of violent victimization: assault, criminal harassment, homicide, robbery, and sexual assault and other sexual offences. These five crimes had total costs estimated to be $12.7 billion in 2009. This total cost can be broken down further to justice system costs ($1.9 billion) victim costs ($10.6 billion) and third-party costs ($0.2 billion) (Hoddenbagh, Zhang & McDonald, 2014).

Media

Service providers from varying regions of the country indicated that media coverage can have both positive and negative effects on the community. The NCVC credits the media with increasing public awareness through several methods including news releases, public service

announcements, and social media outreach (2012). This notion was reiterated by a number of service providers we interviewed. They mentioned using news releases as a method for broadcasting victim services contact information to the general public and reassuring the public about their security within the community.

While many service providers rely on the media to broadcast releases, sometimes the information is excessive. One police victim service provider described how the media often prolongs the sense of fear in the community by keeping the crime in the minds of the general public for an extended period. Another service provider felt that adverse effects on the community are often caused or exacerbated by the media's ongoing coverage of a crime.

According to some research, repeated news coverage of crime may lead to an overestimate in one's probability of personal victimization (Grabosky, 1995). TV news and tabloids have a major impact on citizen's perception of crime with many people getting most of their crime information from the mass media (Cordner, 2010). Local TV news broadcasts often carry a large amount (20-25%) of crime content. This coverage is often of a dramatic nature and may lead residents to believe they are at high risk for what are actually rare occurrences of victimization (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2015).

One service provider mentioned that there may be unnecessary fear in the community based on miscommunication or lack of communication about the facts of the crime. In particular, minority groups may be the focus of fear from members of an uninformed public. This may add to the cause of racism and marginalization of specific groups.

Police Presence

Service providers had mixed opinions about the effect of police presence on communities. One felt that the even after an arrest, the increase in police activity following a crime may leave a community shaken. Another felt that by increasing the presence of police in a community, the residents felt more secure. Some service providers mentioned that reassuring communities about the availability of police was often a way to return to a sense of security (e.g. reminding citizens of 911 emergency services).This may be important as service providers report a potential decrease in the level of trust for those expected to protect citizens such as municipal leadership and police. One victim surveyed spoke of positive changes in the community as a result of increased police presence following several homicides in the area (see *Communities Returning to a Feeling of Security* for further details).

According to research on public perception, the increased presence of police is likely to reduce the fear of crime only in those communities where there is a widespread perception that police are not available and never around when something bad happens. The sudden increase of

police presence may actually increase fear of crime if citizens interpret the enhanced presence as evidence of the existence of danger in the community (Cordner, 2010).

Unity

Many service providers mentioned that an unexpected after-effect of violent crime in a community is a positive coming together of community members. One service provider mentioned that community members may bond over the shared goal of combating crime in their community. Another mentioned the communal support offered to victims following a crime may have a positive effect on the community. In the same vein, another mentioned that the rallying of a community around victims and their families creates a positive feeling amongst its members.

The NCVC reported that confronting a crisis or tragedy often unites community members and moves them to take action (2012). Citizens often share a common sense of outrage, sorrow, and concern that can bring them together. This activism on the part of the community may provide effective tools to address crises such as a missing child, redressing an injustice endured by a victim, and mobilizing communities to prevent future crime (NCVC, 2012).

POLICIES FOR DEALING WITH THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE AND SERVICES AVAILABLE TO THE COMMUNITY

Most service providers surveyed indicated that the community at large *would* be eligible for victim services through police, provincial or community-based organizations. Many jurisdictions do not operate from written policies on serving the community at large. As discussed previously, the media is often utilized by service providers to ensure information is getting out to the public. This may include contact information for services, upcoming meetings and information about the progress of the case. Door-to-door canvassing may take place immediately after a crime. In many cases, provincial victim services are available only to direct victims so the community at large must rely on other resources such as police victim services. Several service providers identified community-based organizations such as the Salvation Army as a resource for community members.

One victim stated that services should be expanded and standardized across Canada so all communities receive the same level of support following a violent crime. For the jurisdictions surveyed, the level of resources available varied. Monetary and staffing resources were particularly problematic, with one service provider noting that while the community at large was of importance, services must be allocated daily depending on the needs of victims. Without available personnel, services are not offered to indirect victims. One service provider spoke of

the frustrations felt by communities following a violent crime – often people feel there is a lack of information and resources available to residents.

Research suggests that with limited resources being available to communities following an emergency, citizens may need to rely on their own strength and resilience (Chandra et al., 2011). Community resilience is the ability of a community to withstand and recover following a traumatic event and is very important to a community's ability to recover quickly after a violent crime. The work of Chandra et al. suggests that policymakers may need to focus on building resilience before an emergency thereby reducing the amount of time and resources spent at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels (2011). Becker suggests that resilience of a community must be internally driven so residents must be provided with resources, education, and support to foster their own recovery (2012).

POLICIES FOR DEALING WITH MASS VICTIMIZATION AND/OR DISASTER

While many service providers do not work from written policies or protocols when dealing with larger scale victimization, many commented on best practices that had been developed following incidents in their own jurisdiction and others. One example of an organized response to mass victimization exists in Calgary where The Calgary Emergency Management Agency (CEMA) provides immediate physical and psychological needs of individuals affected by a major emergency or disaster. According to their website, CEMA would respond to incidents such as the threat of a suspicious device in a public space (2016).

In some circumstances, victim service units may organize larger gatherings of community members, such as a town hall meeting or healing session, to reach more individuals at once. One victim shared the positive experience of town hall meetings being used to bring the concerns of the community to the forefront while allowing the public to interact with local police. Research identifies community input as an important mechanism for identifying the most serious crime and disorder problems in an area. Citizens attending community meetings are often willing to identify their concerns and fears which may not be known to police (Cordner, 2010) (See *Communities Returning to a Feeling of Security* for further details).

Where a large number of indirect victims exist in a single space, such as a business, some organizations may extend their services in private group sessions. Some service providers cited resources as being a major factor in not giving more comprehensive services to members of the community at large. Another mentioned that in cases of large scale effects on the community the municipality would take over the response to ensure both community members and first responders received proper support.

CHANGES MADE AS THE RESULT OF DEALING WITH A SPECIFIC EVENT IN THE JURISDICTION

Several service providers identified new partnerships with other organizations as a common outcome following the aftermath of violent crime in their communities. These partnerships are not always within the criminal justice field, e.g. health services. In Regina, sexual assault victims are able to present to a hospital for treatment and evidence collection but are able to defer their decision on whether to report to police. There is also an option for victims in this city to make anonymous reports to police about their assault without pursuing a formal complaint. Service providers report that these options have a positive effect on the community as they increase the reporting of incidents that often go unknown to police.

Many changes made are often not to the written policies but service providers evaluate after each incident and establish best practices for their day-to-day responses. Changes may not come only in the form of practices but in the addition of equipment that was deemed necessary to respond effectively. Several service providers reported that they monitor incidents both nationally and internationally in order to learn from other jurisdictions.

One victim told of community watch groups becoming more prevalent in the community following several violent crimes. In addition, community leaders worked with police to improve security by adding lighting to dimly lit properties. Another spoke of changes made to local police's interrogation techniques as flaws resulted in the case not going to trial. These types of changes in both community practice and policy have an impact on the direct victims in addition to the community as a whole.

Research indicates that inviting community members to be involved in developing strategies for addressing specific problems and concerns can be very beneficial. Community problem-solving meetings reduced fear of crime among the participants and increased their satisfaction with the police (Johnson, 2015). As discussed in the mass victimization section of this report, community meetings seem to have a very positive effect in areas where a crime has taken place.

COMMUNITIES RETURNING TO A FEELING OF SECURITY

Many service providers had suggestions on how best to support communities in returning to a feeling of security following a violent crime. A majority of these supports came in the form of easy to access information, including through public service announcements, media releases and public meetings. The types of information delivered included reassuring the public of emergency services (e.g. 911) being available 24/7, contacting support and services available in the

community, encouraging community participation (e.g. neighbourhood-watch) and reassuring the members that their fears are normal.

One service provider mentioned that a lack of resources severely limits the amount of focus victim services and patrol units can place on the community as a whole. This is reflected in the work of Cordner who reported that very little emphasis is placed on the importance of a feeling of security amongst community members (2010). The research showed "that feeling safe and not being overcome with fear are important components of peoples' well-being and quality of life..." therefore, communities with a lower fear of crime are stronger and healthier. Cordner suggested that law enforcement agencies should implement fear reduction as one of their core responsibilities (2010).

The connections of community members are important to remember following a tragedy. According to Becker, there should be a "no member left behind mentality" developed in response to a crisis (2014). There is a ripple effect that goes through a community following a trauma that begins with those directly victimized and radiating out to those associated with the victim then to the wider community (Becker, 2014). Those residents who are exposed to a tragedy in their community are at risk for long-term impacts no matter their physical proximity to the crime – the perception of threat is of utmost importance (Becker, 2014).

In terms of public policy, research has suggested it is important to involve both direct and indirect victims in activities that restore public confidence in safety to assure the stability of the community (Xie & McDowall, 2008). As discussed earlier, this is an area where many service providers struggle as they are limited by a lack of resources. Becker suggests that communities need safety, predictability and control in order to cope with trauma (2012). Safety includes feeling physically secure as well as emotionally safe to express themselves and trust others. Predictability includes the need for routine, familiarity and rules. Control includes keeping oneself safe, having an influence on the surrounding world, and making decisions or choices (Becker, 2012).

DEALING WITH CHILDREN FOLLOWING A VIOLENT CRIME

Becker noted that all children are affected by a tragedy in their community and it is important not to assume young children are oblivious to their surroundings (2014). In children who are affected long-term, girls tend to exhibit higher levels of post-traumatic stress disorder while boys tend to exhibit behavioural issues (Becker, 2014). Research has suggested that witnessing violence in one's community may increase the risk for criminal behaviour in young adults (Eitle & Turner, 2002). Children's mental health and ability to thrive are of importance when providing support for children who are exposed to violent crime. According to Harold Koplewicz of the Child

Mind Institute, a number of factors are at play when determining how traumatic an event is to a child (2011). For our purposes, it is important to note the factors that occur after the event, such as the child having support from people close by or any additional stressors that are ongoing. These factors may influence a child's ability to process and recover (Koplewicz, 2011).

In most jurisdictions surveyed, service providers did not deal long-term with children who were affected by violent crime in their communities. Children are generally referred to community-based services after their initial contact with victim service providers at various levels. The availability of services for children was well established in those areas represented in our survey including access to mental health services where required.

One offering of note from a survey respondent was that of the Regina Police Service which has a unique resource for children who have been touched by violent crime – the Regina Children's Justice Centre. This centre provides an integrated approach between justice, health and children's services providers to support children. Victim service providers are available through this centre. Of particular interest is the increased availability of Child Advocacy Centres (CACs) in communities, whose availability more than doubled in 2014 in Canada (http://cac-cae.ca/). These centres provide a coordinated approach to addressing the needs of child and youth victims and witnesses in the criminal justice system. CACs seek to minimize system-induced trauma by providing a single, child-friendly setting for young victims and witnesses and their families to seek services.

COMMUNITY IMPACT STATEMENTS

The *Canadian Victims Bill of Rights* introduced the right of a community to be heard from at the sentencing phase of all criminal trials. A community impact statement (CIS) allows a community representative to describe the impact the crime had on the community, including any physical or emotional harm, property damage, or financial loss (Department of Justice, 2015). The inclusion of these elements was supported by the survey responses received from both stakeholders and victims with many of the impacts identified directly in their answers.

None of the service providers surveyed had utilized the current CIS model in any cases at the time of the survey. There were some who had been involved in using the previous model while others felt they would be involved in assisting with CIS forms in the future. The availability of information about completing and submitting a CIS varies widely across the country.

According to the Department of Justice's factsheet on submitting a CIS, the procedure may be established by each province and territory (2015). It advises that the CIS form may be obtained from the police, victim services or the prosecutor. The factsheet advises seeking

assistance from the victim/community impact statement program in a province or territory to fill out the form. At the time of reporting, not all provinces and territories have made CIS information available to the public through their websites or releases. Phone calls to provincial and territorial victim services offices were met with confusion in several cases as the operator was not sure of how to obtain a form or who should be contacted for assistance. It is our hope this will improve in the near future.

The inclusion of CIS in sentencing is a welcome addition from a victim's perspective. One victim emphasized the importance of the court hearing from the community and hoped that the community would be well-informed of this right and encouraged to take part.

The following is a listing of the resources available from each province and territory at the time of reporting:

British Columbia
A Community Impact Statement must be prepared using the Community Impact Statement Form. Individuals can call 1-844-660-5343 if they have questions about how to complete a Community Impact Statement or they can ask a victim service worker for assistance. To find a victim service worker in your community, contact VictimLinkBC at 1-800-563-0808 (toll-free in BC).

Alberta
Assistance in completing the CIS can be sought from any of Alberta victim service units. Alberta Department of Justice has downloads of both a guide to submitting a CIS as well as a form available on their website.

Saskatchewan
In Saskatchewan, assistance with completing or submitting a CIS may be obtained from any local police service or RCMP detachment. The Government of Saskatchewan provides a download of the CIS form on their website. The form gives a brief explanation of what may be included as well as examples from the VBR.

Manitoba
Manitoba Justice Victim Services may be contacted for CIS information. The Manitoba Justice provides a brief overview of the CIS on their website as well as a form download. The instructions for completing a CIS and examples are included in the download.

Ontario
In Ontario, assistance on completing a CIS is available from Victim Services in your community. To find services use the Victim Services Directory or call the Victim Support Line toll-free at 1-

888-579-2888. There is no information available online from the province of Ontario on submitting a CIS.

Quebec
For those requiring assistance with a CIS, questions can be directed to Justice Quebec at 1-866 - 536-5140 or via email: informations@justice.gouv.qc.ca. Their website offers information on completing a CIS and a form download which includes instructions.

New Brunswick
New Brunswick's Public Safety Department has outdated information on submitting a CIS contained within its Victim Impact Statement brochure with no form available for download. At the time of reporting, we have not received a response to our inquiry about submitting a CIS in New Brunswick.

Prince Edward Island
Prince Edward Island Department of Justice and Public Safety have assistance available via their Charlottetown and Summerside Victim Services offices for community members wishing to submit a CIS. The Department issued a press release in late 2015 discussing the new CIS that was carries in local media and has information about submitting a CIS on their website.

Nova Scotia
Information and assistance in completing a CIS can be obtained from a Victim Service Officer at any regional Victim Services office in Nova Scotia. The Nova Scotia Department of Justice has no information available online about submitting a CIS.

Newfoundland
For information or assistance with completing a CIS, contact a Victim Services Coordinator at any regional office. The Newfoundland Department of Justice and Public Safety offers downloads on their website of both instructions and a form to complete a CIS.

Yukon
Information on completing and submitting a CIS in the Yukon can be obtained from any regional victim services office. No information on submitting a CIS is available on the Yukon territorial website.

Northwest Territories
The Northwest Territories' website provides a download of the CIS form. It has instructions on completing and submitting a CIS contained in the form. For assistance or further information, contact 867-873-7002 for referral (collect calls are accepted).

Nunavut

No specific information on submitting a CIS is available on the Nunavut territorial website. At the time of reporting, we have not received a response to our inquiry about submitting a CIS in Nunavut.

ISSUES FOR FIRST RESPONDERS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

Although it is beyond the scope of this project, several service providers surveyed commented on the impact to first responders and service providers. Victim service providers may be vicariously traumatized by their experiences in assisting victims. This may be especially true in cases where there are a large number of victims or a particularly gruesome crime. One service provider indicated that during situations where immense, long-term support is required, changes are required in how resources are allocated. For example, an advocate who provides immediate crisis support to a victim would not also provide court support in the same case.

A victim service provider located in a rural area made note that in smaller communities, the first responders are often acquainted with the victim. Where the service providers are not directly acquainted with the victim, they are still often deeply impacted by violent crime as they live and work in the community. Becker described a shared traumatic reality for service workers who are also residents of the community which makes self-care very important (2014).

CONCLUSION

The community as a victim is a recently expanded concept under Canadian law. While many jurisdictions are presently providing services for community members, there are still gaps in available services and a lack of the resources required to implement them. It is our hope with the inclusion of community impact statements in the *Criminal Code* that there will be more awareness of the needs of community members following a violent crime and thereby more resources made available. It is our hope that this report will help to bring this issue and the importance of further development to light.

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