

# Victimisation and Youth Justice

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## Introduction

Meeting the needs of victims is widely cited as central to appropriate responses to crime and offending. Indeed, services are compelled by both national and international guidance to identify and engage with individuals and communities harmed by a crime in order to uphold the rights of the victim (e.g. The Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014).

## Who are victims? What do they need? What can we do?

- Victimisation rates are unclear. The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (2010-2011) reported that 17.8% of adults were victim to at least one crime that year. However, children and young people, persons with disabilities, and previous victims of sexual violence and trafficking are thought most likely to be a victim of crime; with young people being the most likely victims of youth crime.
- In terms of impact *“victimisation can have a profound and devastating impact...it can alter a victim’s view of the world as a just place and leave victims with new and difficult feelings and reactions ... crime can affect victims — psychologically, financially, physically and spiritually.”* (Wasserman & Ellis, 2007)
- Victim’s needs are diverse and idiosyncratic. However, it is thought that there are five categories of need: *respectful treatment and recognition; protection; support; access to justice; compensation and restoration.*
- Lack of transparency about how a crime is being dealt with might frustrate these needs. However, the 2014 Act compels agencies to facilitate information sharing, and provide support and protection.
- It is clear that in order to meet victim needs the efforts of multiple agencies working in unison is required, thus there is a role for all in advocacy and signposting. Support might range from advice services to mental and physical health services.
- Fear of retribution and difficulty trusting authority figures were identified as barriers to young victims speaking out in a recent Scottish study of young victims of crime. [The Victim Support Scotland website](#) has a wealth of knowledge about victim needs.
- It has been argued that *restoration* is particularly pertinent to youth justice practice. Indeed, restorative justice interventions are a promising method of reparation for victims. For more on this practice read [Factsheet 7](#).
- A more in-depth consideration of victimisation concerns is outlined in the [youth justice guidance](#).

continued overleaf

## What are the victimisation related needs of young people in the youth justice system?

- Children and young people who display harmful behaviour have been, and often continue to be, victims themselves. They are amongst the most vulnerable and victimised in society, often with extensive histories of childhood abuse(s).
- This poses significant challenges for practitioners, who are charged with both managing the risk of harm posed; and identifying and responding to needs associated with victimisation. Where harmful behaviour is thought to be driven by the effects of victimisation, this need is a particular priority.
- The link between victimisation and later delinquency and violence is well established.
- One process is a learning one, whereby harmful behaviours are learned in violent contexts or subcultures, creating a cycle of violence.
- Other processes are concerned with the impact or victimisation of the child's development. Specifically, that the trauma of victimisation, especially at the hands of caregivers, may:
  1. Compromise a child's ability to regulate emotions
  2. Result in pervasive feelings of being unsafe or under threat
  3. Devastate the child's positive sense of self
- Interventions and preventative efforts need to be targeted towards young people who have been victimised. Justice interventions need to consider the context of the young person and recognise any contribution of trauma to harmful behaviour, and plan interventions accordingly.

### About us

CYJ (Centre for Youth & Criminal Justice) works towards a Scotland where all individuals and communities are safe and flourish; and where Scottish youth justice practice, policy and research is internationally renowned and respected.

Our work focuses on three key areas: practice development, research and knowledge exchange.

CYJ produces a range of monthly factsheets on youth justice and related topics. You can find these by visiting [www.cycj.org.uk](http://www.cycj.org.uk)

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