

An Exploration of the Effectiveness of Social Workers in Empowering Victims of Crime in Alice, Eastern Cape of South Africa

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KEYWORDS Empowerment. Perpetrators. Rights. Social Workers. Victims. Victims' Police

ABSTRACT The aim of the study is to explore the effectiveness of social workers in empowering victims of crime in Alice community. The study used a qualitative research design to collect data from seventeen (17) participants. The findings discovered that people living in rural areas are vulnerable because they do not get the necessary support from the government, social workers and other professional's bodies. However, the role played by social workers to assist victims of crime is not enough because they are few and they had not enough resources to execute their work. The study reveals that most of the victims of crime were females, others were employed and few of them were unemployed. The study recommends that policy makers must evaluate the overall impact of different criminal activities by measuring the extent to which dependence changes as policies are changed. Debates should be centred on discussion of how best to design programs in order to achieve developmental objectives since it is evident that criminal activities grow day by day in South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Victims of crime in Alice have remained vulnerable to crime because they are not getting the necessary support and expected empowerment from communities despite the fact they would have been disadvantaged. As such, the neglect of victims of crime is an indication of the seeming ineffectiveness of social work approach in empowering victims of crime. It was from such a standpoint that the researchers seek to empirically engage in the present study which also explores the approaches of social workers in empowering the victims of criminality in Alice.

In actual sense, the trauma of living with that thought was however blamed on the lack of assistance towards victims of crime (Nel and Kruger 1999). It was noted that as soon as crimes were reported to police officers, the focus was now on the perpetrator and the victim is no longer of importance or offered any help in the form of social work. The only help that most victims were getting was the assurance that the perpetrator would rot in jail, but what happened to the victim after the sentencing of the criminal was not and remains unknown. According to

the above statistics suggested an apparent link between the two concepts, namely approaches of social work and crime victims, which, in part, formed the basis of the motivation for the current researchers to undertake the study.

“The basic provision of timely information can assist victims in coping with the impact of victimisation. A lack of information can only act to aggravate these symptoms and in many cases can result in victims disengaging with the criminal process and withdrawing their co-operation” (Wedlock et al. 2014).

Furthermore, a single point of contact or advocate is an effective way to provide victims with the combination of both information and support required to help them regain a sense of autonomy, which the crime has taken from them. However, not all victims will require the same levels of information and support, so early identification of a victim's needs means that services can be targeted at those who most want and need them. In order to provide effective support this single point of contact should be undertaken by a trained professional, with sufficient knowledge of the criminal justice system, as well as the compassion and empathy to be a source of moral support (Wedlock et al. 2014).

The fact that people experience victimisation differently emphasises the need for a range of support services that offer accessible and flexible services, so that the right interventions can be offered to those who want them at a time when they need them most (Ministry of Justice 2012).

Problem Statement

Victims of crime are often neglected within the social work system and they lack assistance in the form of social work counselling and monitoring to see how they are coping after a crime has been committed. Lawson (2012) mentions that there are renowned schools of thought in the form of behavioural and social work theorists that have put forward the suggestion that there is a belief that perpetrators of crime were abused as kids and this is likely to be the key to their criminal behaviour. Though authors who subscribe to such ideas increase by the day (Lawson 2012), cites that polarised views still exist in the form of biological theorists, for instance, who argue that certain individuals are born with an inclination to be criminals and given the right conditions, such individuals are likely to be perpetrators of crime.

Whilst arguments from both the social work, sociological and biological camps are admittedly attractive and the discussions sprouting from such are equally eye opening, the researchers are, however, less interested in delving into the over-trodden path of the causes of crime. This decision comes from the realization that the causes of crime are multi-facial in nature and cannot be located within a single domain be it social, biological or otherwise. More so, it has been viewed as not sufficient to merely locate the causes of the problem without looking at the social factors which contribute to the life of the problem.

Objectives of the Study

- ♦ To find out whether the family members assist victims of crime.
- ♦ To assess the social work support structures used to support victims of crime.

Research Questions

- ♦ Do the family members assist victims of crime?

- ♦ What social work support structures used to support victims of crime?

Theoretical Framework

The Victim Precipitation Theory

The victims may actually initiate either passively or actively, the criminal act that ultimately leads to injury or death. During passive precipitation, the victim unconsciously exhibits behaviour or characteristics that instigate or encourage the attack. Siegel (2006) lists job promotions, job status, success, love, interest and the like as examples of these unconscious behaviours and characteristics.

Essentially, the victim precipitation theory focuses on the idea that passive precipitation in violence is a result of a power struggle. A politician may feel threatened by an activist group leader because his/her personality and "actions that will, or may cause a loss of power in society. Active precipitation on the other hand is the opposite of the afore-described. Victimisation under this theory occurs through the threatening or provocative actions of the victim. One of the most controversial points of this theory is the idea that women who are raped actively contributed in some way either through provocative dress, a relationship, or suggested consent of intimacy (Siegel 2006).

Victims after a Crime Has Been Committed

How a victim reacts to a crime depends on quite a number of variables. Such variable may include; the type of crime; whether you know the person who committed the crime; the support you get (or don't get) from your family, friends, the police and other people around you; and things that have happened to you in the past (because if you've had to deal with difficult events before you may have found ways of coping) (Victim Support Services 2016). Although, each person has his/her own way of tackling life, handling and reacting to situations, and viewing the world in general, there are some common responses that can be found in most people. Sometimes people feel quite normal for a while and then things may suddenly start to fall apart. Examples of these responses are not limited to shock, denial, confusion, guilt, trouble sleeping, flash backs, outburst, and anxiety. These

are the typical responses that may be consequent from victimization (Victim Support Services 2016).

Quite often, victims struggle with confusion about what has happened, and what is going on around them. They may repeat themselves several times; unaware of whom they have previously said things to. Some frequently think that they should have been able to do something to prevent the crime.

If not given the proper support they need, victims may suffer from what is known as secondary injuries (Victim Support Services 2016). Secondary injuries are described as victims not receiving the support and help they need after the crime.

As a result they may be hurt by a lack of understanding from friends, family, and the professionals they come into contact with particularly if others seem to blame the victim for the crime (suggesting they should have been able to prevent or avoid it). Police, prosecutors, judges, social service providers, the media, coroners, and even clergy and mental health professionals may contribute to such secondary injuries.

If victims are to recover from the traumatic event, it is crucial that they are provided with the proper support during the initial impact stage and throughout the criminal justice process. Immediate crisis intervention is needed (Victim Support Services 2016). Trained crisis interveners should inquire about the victim's welfare by asking if they feel safe, assuring victims that they are safe if that is true, and determining if they are in need of medical attention.

If victims have difficulty in rebuilding or finding a new equilibrium, they may suffer from a long-term crisis reaction or from posttraumatic stress disorder. Victims never completely forget about the crime. The pain may lessen and even subside, but their lives are changed forever. Victims who suffer from long-term crisis reactions can be thrown back into the initial crisis reaction by what are known as "triggers" (National Centre for Victims of Crime (NCV) 2012). Many victims will have particular triggers that remind them of their victimization, such as sights, smells, noises, birthdays, holidays or the anniversary of the crime.

The most agonizing experience for victims involves dealing with the criminal justice system if and when an offender is apprehended. Participation in the criminal justice system, how-

ever, can aid victims in rebuilding their lives (NCV 2012; Victim Support Services 2016).

Role of Various Bodies towards Victims of Crime

There are three key policy documents that attempt to address the needs and rights of crime victims in South Africa. The first important policy document is the National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) developed by the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development in 1996. It was the first policy document that prioritised the victims of crime and advocated for a victim-centred approach to justice. The processes related to the implementation of the NCPS resulted in the introduction of the Victim Empowerment Programme (VEP) (Cheryl 2007). Additionally, Victims' Charter was observed as the second document which was introduced in 2004. It was the first and only cabinet-approved policy. The third document, which is the Uniform Protocol for the Management of Victims, Survivors and Witnesses of Domestic Violence and Sexual Offences (UPVM) was introduced by the National Prosecuting Authority in 2005.

Victims' Charter

In January 2005, a Victims' Charter consolidated the current legal framework on the rights of victims of crime and the services to be provided to them. The charter was in such a way that; it ensured victims remained at the core of the justice system; it eliminated "secondary victimization"; it clarified the service standards; and provided resources in the event the service standards were not adhered to.

The rights of the victims contained in the Victims' Charter were elaborated and brought to reality by the Minimum Standards on Service for Victims of Crime which gave detailed information that enabled victims to exercise their rights, and services providers to adhere to them (SouthAfrica.info 2016). This was established to promote victim empowerment.

One of the rights included in the charter was the victim's right to be fairly treated with respect and dignity. This meant the right to be attended to promptly and courteously. Based on this chapter it is clear that the legal system has tried to account for the assertion that 'victims of crime are often neglected'. If there is any form of neg-

ligence, it would be from the services providers not adhering to the Victims' Charter.

With that being said, the Minimum Standards on Service for Victims of Crime stipulates the following procedure when someone has committed a crime: reporting to the South African Police Service (SAPS); medical report should be completed and submitted; case headed to prosecutor; victim called in as witness.

The charter does not stipulate a social worker to ascertain the mental, emotional and psychological wellbeing of a victim. Despite catering for victims in one way more than the other, the charter does not mitigate against psychological and emotional negligence. The chapter stipulates the involvement of social services in the event of threats after prosecution of the perpetrator. This could imply that without any form of threatening targeted towards the victim, social services may not be involved.

The other loop with the Charter is the use of statements such as 'where relevant' and 'where available'. These offer officials "escape clauses which can be used to justify inaction" (Faull and Mphuthing 2009). The vagueness of the wording in the Service Charter provides a ready excuse for any public servant who fails to act in the interests of a victim.

Study with victims of crime conducted by Tapley (2005) indicated that the majority of victims were not informed about the Victims' Charter. Newlove (2015) found that many victims were unaware of their entitlement to make a Victim Personal Statement, with forty-nine percent (49%) of victims not told about the Victim's Right to Review and many were not aware of the eventual outcome. The CPS survey found that those victims entitled to the enhanced services were not always made aware of them and were not always advised about their entitlement to special measures".

Victim Empowerment Policy, Forum and Programme

The Victim Empowerment Programme (VEP) was introduced in 1999 and was managed by the Department of Social Development (DSD). However, in 2008 the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) took over management of the VEP because the Department of Social Development had made little progress in almost a decade (Faull and Mphuthing 2009).

Victim empowerment is an approach to facilitating access to a range of services for all people who have suffered trauma, harm, disaster only to mention a few. The process involves having (or taking) control, having a say, being listened to, being recognized and respected as an individual.

It is aimed at making the criminal justice process be more victim-friendly and minimise the negative impact of crime on victims. Forums are run where victims can meet and talk to health practitioners and councillors. According to Kuyasheshwa (2012) all police stations have Victim empowerment officers or volunteers to assist victims of violence. The South African Police Services (SAPS) began using the VEP in year 2000.

South Africa's Victim Empowerment Policy is based upon the concept of restorative justice which promotes a victim-centred approach to criminal justice. This approach has resulted in reduced victimisation, while simultaneously improving service standards in the system.

While services to empower victims of crime have somewhat increased in recent years in South Africa, they have not been managed as an integrated whole within and between the various government departments, nor with other stakeholders (Department of Social Development 2013).

In 2001, a Victim Empowerment Training Manual was developed by the police in consultation with 'victimologists', academics, non-governmental organisations and government officials (Faull and Mphuthing 2009). All police stations were instructed to train members (role players) in victim empowerment. Figures from Faull and Mphuthing (2009) show that 3,346 members of the police service were trained between 2002 and 2008.

The SAPS has tried to establish 'victim friendly rooms' in all police stations for the purpose of taking statements from people who are traumatized. According to Department of Social Development (2013) role players render pockets of services without guidance from an institutional framework, thus often exposing the client to further victimisation and discontent with service delivery.

At times the trained members of the police service or NGO volunteers may encounter a severely traumatised victim. In such cases they may try to provide ad hoc counselling, which

they are not equipped to do. Counselling from individuals without recognised qualifications, and without recognised supervision, could be damaging to victims/clients. Such counsellors are not bound by a code of ethics and could thus violate a victims' confidentiality (Faull and Mphuthing 2009).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used qualitative research design. The researchers used a case study research design to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of social work in empowering victims of crime and rely heavily on in-depth interviews as well as focus group discussions to explore the effectiveness of social work in empowering victims of crime in Alice Community.

Population

The population of the study constituted of social workers, police officers, psychologist, care worker, medical doctor, nurse and youths from eighteen (18) years and also adults of upto sixty-five (65) years of age both males and females who have been victimized in the Alice community.

Sampling and Sampling Technique

The sampling of the study comprised of (2) social workers, (2) police officers, (1) psychologist, (1) care worker, (1) medical doctor, (1) nurse and (5) youth from eighteen (18) years of age and also (4) adults of up to sixty five (65) years of age both males and females who have been victimized. These participants were selected purposively because they can be easily located and available for the study.

Research Instruments

The researchers employed in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as instruments of exploring the effectiveness of social work in empowering victims of crime. The researchers decided to utilise a case study design to satisfy the qualitative approach. Lester (1999) believes that qualitative research was effective in bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their perspectives

and in so doing, challenging structural or narrative assumptions.

Data Analysis

The study used themes in analysing all the collected data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were presented according to themes. Findings and their discussions are presented as follows:

Biographical Presentation of Victims, Police, Psychologist, Care Worker, Nurse and Social Workers

Race

All seventeen (17) participants were black African individuals and they speak isiXhosa as their home language. There were nine youth and eight adults. The researchers used pseudonyms to name the participants.

Unit/Location

The findings showed that seventeen participants have a place to stay, either at a unit or an institution they are studying.

Gender

Ten participants were females and the other seven participants were all males.

Age

Age of participants were 18 to 65 years both males and females.

Occupation

Only five among the females' participants were studying and were identified as students, one was employed and four were unemployed. Out of the seven male participants, the findings shows that three were unemployed, two were employed and other two were studying.

Organization

The two (2) participants were selected from Social Development, three (3) from Po-

lice, two (2) from Hospital and ten (10) from the communities.

Experience

The social work participants have an experience that ranges from three years to ten years practicing as social work, the police range from five to fifteen years, doctors, psychologist and nurse range from eight to twelve years. All of the participants work with victims of crime except only one participant who work as a care worker at police station.

Gender

(a) Focus Group

There were two female social worker participants, one female care worker, one male doctor, one male psychologist, one female and one male police officers and one female nurse.

(b) In-depth Interviews

There were six female participants and three male participants from the community. The researchers used pseudonyms for participants.

University Qualification

Two social worker, psychologist, doctor, nurse participants hold each obtained degrees from various South African universities, care worker has. Police officers have matric.

Sipokazi said it was during night time since she was having a late class that day and she got transport late because she was hiking and there were no taxis at that time. She met a guy who grabbed her to bush with a knife on her neck then he told her to strip her underwear, she did that and she ordered her to lie down and he started to rape her. All the time she wants to cry, but because of the knife that was on her neck she did not because she was afraid of being stabbed or killed.

Sondezwa said it was early morning in winter round about 5 o'clock it was dark she was on her way to taxi rank when she met two boys and grabbed her bag and demanding her cell phone. They both draw big knives where they demanded her to go to the direction they ordered her to go to. They forced her to enter the

shark/ghetto where they forcefully stripped her underwear and repeatedly raped her by doing changes/games.

Mluleki said he was on his way back home from one of his families. He met group of guys where they did not asked or said anything they started to beat, assault and robbed him his wallet and cell phone. It was late hours of the night round about 10 to 11 o'clock.

Sontonga said he was on his way back from work to home where he met three guys where they demand him to give them phone, money and bag and he told them he won't do that and they started to insult, beat and stabbed him to death but fortunately for him they were thinking that he was dead and they ran away or fled the scene with his belongings and he managed to wake up and he was helped by one of community member that saw him because he was taking two steps and fallen down.

Sibabalo said he was trying to make some more cash where he tried to join the bogus scheme because he felt that he was not doing enough to support his family because he was not earning enough money from his job/ work. That was where he became a victim of crime and he understand what was he doing was wrong. He was robbed all his money by the scheme he joined but fortunately for him he was still working and he was traumatised because he lost all his money.

Thapelo said she was an alcoholic sometimes she slept in taverns. That was where she became a raped victim because she was drunk. What happened to her, she regrets the fact that she has no parents?

Avu said his brother likes to drink alcohol he was stabbed while he was on his way back home. To their surprise the police officers did not bother to tell them or tried to find out the family of the deceased up until today there was no one arrested. They were told by one of community members that his brother was stabbed to death on the street and when they tried to ask about who killed him no one came forward. He further explained that they were no court case nothing happened his brother died like a dog. This show how hurtful he was because he took the death of his brother like someone who died badly like a dog. Even today they do not know the perpetrators.

Mshoza cried before she explained the reason that leads her to become a rape victim. She

said she was raped at the tavern because she was always there. She was drinking alcohol that was bought by one of the guys she used to drink with them. He forceful told her that he was going to sleep with her whether she likes it or not because he cannot buy her booze and got nothing in return. The man draws a big knife and told her to go to the nearest bush from the tavern and he started to rape her. After, he finished what he was doing she went to tavern owner and report what happened to her.

Tshokwe said she called by an old guy (father) to his house asking her to clean his house since he was staying alone. She went there as usual as she used to do washing and clean houses for other community members. When she arrived there, the guy told her what she must do and after five hours she was working the guy asked her that she was not hungry then she said yes and if there was something to eat he can offer her, then she told her to go to his room in order to get something to cook. She went as she was instructed but when she arrived looking for food the guy came in and closed the door and asked her not to scream if she did that he will killed her. He instructed to go and sleep on his bed and he started repeatedly raped her the whole day and also said if she told anyone about what happened he will kill her and also threatened that he will killed and raped her younger sisters.

However, Tshokwe did not revealed the ordeal or incident for two years. Now that she saw the same stories from others, television and radio she was able to tell or speak out to her parents everything and the reason why she kept that for a very long time.

Nontoza said after she finished her matric she started drinking alcohol because she did not see any use or reason of going to school because most of her friends were drinking and they were not studying. One night it was Wednesday (ladies night) she prepared to go out with her friends as usual. On her way to the tavern she saw two guys where they asked her to give them money and she responded that she did not have. They grabbed her and started searching her they took her cell phone and money she had, after that they grabbed her to the nearest bush. All the time she was crying for help and apologised to them but they did not want to listen and unfortunately for her no one heard or come to rescue her. They started to

rape her in turns for five hours all the time they raped her mouth by the scarf. They also said they are not going to kill her but she must not tell anyone and she promised as they say.

Kwekwe said it was late evening he was from town he got hike because there were no taxis. It was about 20:30 when he arrived at his village or community. He dropped by the car on the main road far from his home then he took short cuts as usual and it was dark during that day. On the way home he met three boys they did not asked anything they came straight to him and grab his bag when his was trying to asked them what they were doing they beat and stab him badly where he did not get any chance to fight back. After, they beat and stab him they fled the scene thinking that he was dead but fortunately he was still alive. He tried to crawl to get help because he was very far from his home but he managed to crawl to the nearest house. It's when he got helped because the people were there called the ambulance and the police. But, the ambulance did not arrived early they called another guy who had a car in order to take him to hospital. On their way to hospital they met the ambulance and stopped it and he was taken to ambulance where he can arrived and get help quickly.

Agcobile said he usually came late from school, sometimes he slept at school with friends when they were studying and his parents know about that. It was Friday night when he was on his way back from school and he was walking alone, he crossed the river next to school he was about to reach garden that is close to the river when he met four guys of his age. They came and asked him to give them everything he had but because he was bold enough to fight for himself he told them nothing belongs to them on his position. They said again aggressively that he must give them everything before they help themselves because it won't be nice if they helped by their selves. He did not stopped or waited for them to came he went straight to them and started the fight because he knows whether he gave them or not they will rob and beat him so it was better for to him to start the fight and they fought back and stabbed him five times on his chest and at the back. He fallen down and they took everything that belongs to him and ran away or fled the scene because they were afraid of someone who will come since the road was very busy but unfortunately

for him it was quite at that time. He cried for help and fortunately for him there were two people that coming from school and they heard him and helped him. They took him to hospital because the hospital was not far. He bleeds a lot of blood and he became very weak.

The qualitative results demonstrate that people who are victimised the most are the ones who are working, studying and the homes which are child-headed households. Thus, the perpetrators are mostly the youth who are not working, abusing drugs and alcohol as well which shows that the failure of the government to make means to empower rural communities with skills and offer them with jobs. The findings also shows the supply and demand of labour because most participants who were interviewed felt that employment could make a significant difference for most people and the rate of crime will decrease if people were working.

They were homes that were headed by grandparents (old people) which they know they cannot do anything for themselves because they do not have power or strength to do things on their own. This shows the need of visible police officials in rural areas because the elderly people are the targets of criminals also. It is difficult for those who had secondary education to get employment and also those who are still in tertiary education there is no guarantee that they will get work as soon as they finish their studies because of the high rate of unemployment in the country.

Due to the nature of the Raymond Mhlaba municipality, economic opportunities are scarce and the only means of survival seems to be social grants (Gutura 2011). That is why the rate of crime is so high. The families of victims of crime and their communities played significant roles to help and support victims of crimes more especially in their difficult *times*. They tried by all means to be there for them no matter what the circumstances are and they talk with the same voice and language to fight crime in their areas. The researchers also found out that if government cannot come up with concrete solution to help rural areas to fight criminal activities people they will take the law in their own hands because people are tired of criminals in their areas or communities.

According to the National Policy Guideline for Victim Empowerment, crime and violence continue to present a dilemma to the South Afri-

can democracy and they are an impediment to attaining a better life for all. Despite the best efforts of government as well as civil society organizations to prevent crime and violence, these remain challenges that impact all South Africans, directly and/or indirectly. The impacts, which can be physical, emotional, social and economic, are experienced not only by the victims themselves, but by their families and communities.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that most of the victims of crime are females. Additionally, most victims of crime were unemployed, others were students, few of them were employed and they were the targets of criminals. Furthermore, the study reveals that social workers faced a challenge in order to assist victims of crime. South Africa has well-developed and very good policies that were developed in the past century to fight victimisation in the communities or in societies. There is a lack of monitoring system in those policies whereas there are officials who are employed to do such or to execute such mandate. Government need to revisit the policies and come up with something concrete to fight crime in the country, or in societies. Government must draw policies that fits today's generations because those ones were drafted for fighting the apartheid government. Now that things have changed, policies needs to be changed as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

South Africa should move away from the policies that are not working and implement more developmental policies. Debates should be centred on discussions of how best to design programmes in order to achieve developmental objectives since it is evident that criminal activities grow day by day in the country. Government must utilise tertiary institutions or academics in order to get concrete and most powerful outcomes. The study recommends that policy makers must evaluate the overall impact of different criminal activities by measuring the extent to which dependence changes as policies are changed. However, to reach development the followings strategies must be recommended that is:

Unemployment

Government must create employment for people because the rate of crime is escalating because people are unemployed. They thought the better way of surviving is to do criminality. There are many ways that can be done to fight this syndrome, for example, there were strategies that the democratic elected government destroyed that were used by old government that is, Transkie, Boputhatswana, Venda and Ciskie (TBVC) States and Old South African government that people were benefited from, but now that we moved away from those systems used by previous government there other ways that can be done to overcome this. For instance, the implementation and support of small scale entrepreneurs, cooperatives and so on. While a large group of measures and policies have been developed to promote smallholder sector, there have only been significant successes. This sheds some light on the shifting priorities over time and where provinces might actually diverge from the emphasis, at national level and concentrate on those at the community level. Government should implement strategies to empower communities to invest with the little they got. Government must create job opportunities for rural people because there is a lot that they can do to fight poverty because all these criminal activities in rural areas is the result of unemployment.

Education and Vocational Training

South Africa is a developing country so there is a demand of highly skilled and educated workers but apparently it does not have appropriate skilled and educated labour force to fulfil the country's need. That means there is a need of more tertiary and Tvet institution and vocational training. Therefore, there is a need for subsidizing education and occupational training as it serves as a venture in the future of the economy of the country. This will also decrease the high rate of crime in societies.

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Paper received for publication on September 2017
Paper accepted for publication on December 2017