

Child Victims

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Abstract:

This paper provides some critical reflections on the relatively neglected topic of child victims. In an attempt to address some current knowledge gaps, it considers the scope of available crime data, examines how children may be victims on the grounds of their personal characteristics, and looks at children's relationship to prevailing legislation and societal power dynamics, both in the UK and abroad. In highlighting some of the consequences of child victimisation, it argues for the shoring up of both interprofessional responses and potential prevention strategies.

Key words:

Child Victims / Victimisation / Homicide / Abduction / Smacking

Introduction

The law in England and Wales classifies a child as anyone under the age of 18 years. This means that any consideration of child victims necessarily spans the range of those who might be victimised as babies, as toddlers, as primary schoolchildren, and as early or late adolescents.

Child victims have tended to be somewhat overlooked as a category within the literature on victimisation. This is in spite of the fact that there is much in the published domain about the types of crime which have frequently been perpetrated upon them. In all likelihood this is an omission which reflects both their structural location within family/state care, education and community systems and the priorities of the adult world upon which they are dependent.

This article will examine the ways in which crimes against children may be categorised, how society and the law respond to children as victims and why some children may be victimised on the grounds of their personal characteristics alone. It will chronicle some of the outcomes of victimisation as a child, and consider appropriate methods of working more proactively to support those who are, have been, or may become child victims.

Categorisation of and Data about Child Victims

There is currently no single national source on the nature and prevalence of childhood victimisation. Discrete sets of statistics on specific crimes to children can, however, be found in annual publications such as *Criminal Statistics in England and Wales*; the *British Crime Survey* sections on the self-reports of 12-15 year old

victims; *Mortality Statistics* sections on children up to 15 years; *Children and Young People on Child Protection Registers*; and in one-off pieces of published research about, for example, the prevalence of school bullying and particular types of child abuse, both of which, in common with around 58% of all offences (Ashworth, 2000) are liable not to be reported to the Police. This constitutes a major omission in the fund of data which is available about children.

As the Gulbenkian Report of the Commission on Children and Violence notes, '...children suffer far more violent victimisation than do adults' (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1995: 256). The report argues that this level of victimisation is because of their largely dependent status, which renders them more vulnerable to 'conventional' crimes such as homicide and assault, to family violence including violent punishments, sexual abuse by parents and others, and assaults by siblings, and to institutional violence such as bullying in schools. To this list might be added abuse and bullying in children's homes, secure units and juvenile Young Offender Institutions (YOIs), in all of which children and adolescents have variously sustained racist attacks, other serious assaults including rape, and have in some cases died or committed suicide as a result.

Two reports by Sir William Utting (1997, 2004) set out graphically the way in which social care systems are still failing to safeguard children living away from home. Reference is made, for example, to the Staffordshire 'Pin Down' Inquiry (Levy and Kahan, 1991) and to the case of Frank Beck, a social work training manager who was found to have carried out systematic rape and buggery in Leicestershire Children's Homes from 1973 to 1986; and to the Clwyd Inquiry (Waterhouse, 2000) which revealed abuse of children in residential care in the possible context of a paedophile ring.

Between 1990 and 2002, 152 juveniles died in custody as a result of self-inflicted injuries (Amnesty International, 2002). Amnesty's report chronicles prominent cases of children who have died in custody in recent years including: 17-year old Kevin Henson who hung himself in Feltham YOI in 2000, not having been placed on suicide watch despite known emotional and anxiety disorders; and 16-year old Kevin Jacobs, who also hanged himself in Feltham, having been placed on suicide watch but with lack of clarity as to whether hourly checks had been carried out during the night he died.

As Goldson (2002:9) notes, secure accommodation which is for the express purpose of restricting a child's liberty, 'straddles the conceptual space that awkwardly separates the child welfare and youth justice systems'. Deaths in secure care during 2004 included 15 year old Gareth Myatt who died while being restrained in the privately-run Hassockfield Secure Training Centre, and 14 year old Adam Rickwood, the youngest person ever to die in custody, who took his own life also in

Hassockfield. In this connection, it is material to note that children in England and Wales are criminalised from the age of 10, and have been more likely to be so since Jack Straw, as Home Secretary, rescinded the rebuttable presumption of *doli incapax* (incapable of understanding the difference between right and wrong) for 10-13-year olds, in 1997, following its unsuccessful application to the two 11-year old children convicted of the murder of James Bulger in 1993. In the majority of European countries, children's offending would be a matter for the welfare agencies up to at least the age of 14, and in some cases up to 18 years.

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Finkelhor (1997) suggests a framework of four categories for child victimisation:

- Conventional specialised crimes homicide, assault (on young children mostly by parents; on adolescents mostly by peers and other acquaintances); sexual assault; theft and robbery.
- Child abuse (emotional, physical, sexual) and neglect.
- Specialised crimes abduction of children by (a) strangers or (b) family members
- Non-criminalised violent acts - e.g. assault by other children including siblings; Corporal punishment (including smacking); child prostitution. Child labour, female circumcision and witnessing domestic violence (where a child may be an indirect victim) constitute other examples.

Although exact numbers cannot be ascertained through current data systems, some of the victimisation types referred to in each of Finkelhor's four categories will be discussed here.

Homicide

Homicide is the rarest, but clearly the most serious crime to be committed on children. Criminal statistics show an average of 79 child deaths per annum for the last 28 years (babies being the most at risk); in 78% of these cases, parents are the principal suspect. (Creighton and Tissier 2003). Those killed by friends, acquaintances, other associates and strangers are, thus, very much in the minority.

It is important, however, to underline that there is general dissatisfaction with the reporting, recording and analysis of deaths of children and young people. Current statistics are thought to afford a significant underestimate of prevalence. As one example, in the case of suspicious deaths of babies and younger children, where parents deny guilt and there is insufficient evidence for a prosecution, open verdicts are usually recorded. As shown earlier, annual mortality statistics published by the Office for National Statistics do not include rates for 16 and 17 years olds who are at much higher risk of death than younger children.

Child abuse

In the UK, child abuse is generally recognised as belonging to one or more of the categories of physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect. There is debate about the definitions of these terms, but those seeking more information may refer to the Government guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and protect the welfare of children (Dept. of Health *et al.* 1999). As with child deaths, the prevalence of child abuse is generally believed to be seriously under-reported and recorded and also frequently to go unrecognised. Recent figures suggest the following in relation to the year 1st April 2002 to 31st March 2003.

- There were 4109 reported offences of 'cruelty or neglect of children' and 1880 of 'gross indecency with a child under the age of 14' in England and Wales
- There were 30,200 children's names added to child protection registers in England
- There were 570,000 referrals concerning child maltreatment to social services departments in England

A breakdown of all these cases shows the following proportions: Neglect, 39%; Physical abuse, 19%; Emotional Abuse, 18%; Sexual Abuse, 10%; Mixed categories, 15%. (Creighton, 2004). As in the case of child deaths, much of the abuse is parental.

Child Abduction

Abduction constitutes a very small proportion of all offences against children. In 2002/3, just over half of abductions were attempted only; 56% involved a stranger and 47% of these were unsuccessful. Of the remaining 9% abductions which were successful (68 in number) at least 6% were sexually motivated. These figures represented an increase on previous years, but this is generally put down to greater public awareness, and higher levels of reporting and recording (Newiss and Fairbrother, 2004).

Smacking

In their national study of parents, children and discipline in the UK, Ghate *et al.* (2003) included in the category of severe violence, '*smacking/slapping of the head or face*', and found a rate of 90 per 1000 children in this category. Eight European countries have now imposed a complete ban on the physical punishment of children. In England and Wales, smacking remains legal but, since the Human Rights Act 1998 (incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989) came into force in October 2001, courts have been obliged to consider whether punishment amounts to 'reasonable chastisement'. The factors to be weighed are the nature and context of the treatment and its duration; its physical and mental effects and, in some circumstances, the sex, age and state of health of the victim.

At the same time, protection from harm is as much of a human rights issue for children as it is for adults - arguably more so as they are both smaller and more fragile. The Convention on the Rights of the Child may now have acquired the status of international law, but children cannot on their own seek justice through the courts when they are victimised (frequently within behind the closed doors of their own family) and their Convention rights are breached. On the day this article was finalised (2 November 2004), a majority of MPs voted against an outright ban on smacking within the new Children Bill, and in favour of an amendment allowing light chastisement, with the caveat that no grazes, scratches, minor swellings, cuts or bruises should ensue. In the event that they do, the maximum sentence will be 5 years' imprisonment. It was notable, however, that the Government allowed a free ('conscience') vote on fox-hunting but retained its three-line whip on the question of physical punishment to children.

Victimisation on the Basis of Personal Characteristics

As is the case for adults, some children are more likely to fall prey to victimisation by reason of identity-based characteristics such as gender, race, religion, disability and so on:

Certain groups of children are particularly at risk of violence, including disabled children and children from some minority ethnic groups. Victimisation statistics in crime surveys and other interview research provide prima facie evidence of discrimination. Racial harassment, always a form of violence and often involving physical violence, threatens many children in the community and in schools.

(Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1995: 115).

Children may be singled out for school bullying and find themselves victimised as members of families of black and ethnic minority origin and/or of minority religions. Added to this is the risk of such victimisation going unrecognised by schools and criminal justice agencies because of institutional racism (Macpherson, 1999) and despite the requirement of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, 2000 for Public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination. More recently, the misperception of Muslims as terrorists, linking them with al Qaida and the attacks on the World Trade Center on 11th September 2001, has triggered well-documented victimisation and 'hate crime' towards Muslim families and communities. The Nottinghamshire Common Monitoring Scheme found that 11.4% of the victims of racially motivated crime were under the age of 10 years (Midlands Probation Training Consortium, 1998). Other studies have shown the pervasion of racial bullying, harassment and attack across the lifespan, beginning in childhood. (Bowling, 1998 Clancy *et al.* 2001; Garland and Chakraborti, 2004)

In terms of gender characteristics, a review of the research shows that boys are more vulnerable than girls to physical abuse and non-family assaults, whilst girls are more vulnerable than boys to sexual abuse (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1995). Female children are particularly (though of course not exclusively) likely to become the subjects of child pornography, and increasingly so on the internet, where it is fast becoming a major social problem. The debate surrounding the issue of what actually constitutes child pornography, and at what point viewing it actually becomes a crime, serves only to reduce the significance of the child victim concerned. Two researchers in this field make the point that the process of trying to understand an unpalatable phenomenon brings with it the accompanying danger of appearing to condone it; they refer to a 6 year old female child victim whom no-one could actually remember, and this is reminiscent of the victim 'grid' which depicts a victim submerged and faceless under a density of psychosocial projections and legislative paraphernalia (Boswell *et al.* 2002). They also note the pervading tension of official reluctance to censor on the internet versus obvious child protection issues, both set against the increasing sexualisation of childhood in the media. (Taylor and Quayle, 2003)

Research on children with disabilities has been sparse, but recent work has shown that they are a distinct high-risk group for victimisation and maltreatment, being on average two to three times more likely to be abused than non-disabled children. (Little, 2004). Further, while they often come to the attention of the health services, their condition may mask the fact that they have been abused or otherwise victimised, thus undermining the quality of the assessment and treatment they receive.

Legal Responses to Child Victims

As Walklate (1989) noted, many professionals have been concerned at the potential for the formal court processes to intimidate victims, particularly existing vulnerable groups, such as children, and to victimise them further in the process. This is likely to be especially true in cases where children have been abused and have to face both their abusers and an adversarial system in a judicial climate not known for its sensitivity to children or indeed its understanding of abuse and its effect on the victim. Thus, until relatively recently, the Police and Crown Prosecution Services have tended to take the view that it is not in the public interest to proceed with a prosecution.

This is one example of the way in which children have historically been denied their right to due process. It may be argued that everyone, whatever their age, should be entitled to a full public hearing, when judge, jury and society at large can weigh up the evidence and draw conclusions appropriate to their role. Adolescents, in particular, may also wish to be credited with the capacity for independent thought, judgement and decision-making. In recent years, however, Courts have begun to adapt their procedures where child victims are involved, so as to make those procedures both meaningful and non-intimidating. For example, there have been moves by court personnel to remove wigs and other formal trappings. Courts have used video recordings and live link facilities in an attempt to make children more relaxed when giving evidence. These developments culminated in the guidance issued to Crown Prosecutors under the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, to the effect that children should now automatically be entitled to these special measures.

Prior to this enactment, however, an evaluation of the use of videotaped evidence in England and Wales, had found that this facility had not been used as widely as expected. Only a low proportion of cases led to a recommendation of prosecution, though the number of cases to reach court was rising. Most applications to show videotaped evidence during a trial, however, were granted. The majority of cases using videotaped evidence at trial were cases of child sexual abuse (Bull and Davies, 1996). Follow-up research found that children using tape seemed significantly less anxious than those using the live link facility (now installed in over half of all Youth Courts) and that there appeared to be no impact on the apparent credibility of the child as a witness. The researchers also observed that one of the most critical factors in the extent of distress levels was the approach and questioning tactics of the defence barrister, again highlighting the dependence of children on the adult world for sympathetic and just treatment (Wilson and Davies, 1999). It is also important to note that not all courts by any means yet have special facilities in place for child victims to give evidence by video tape or live link.

Prior to 1990, in England and Wales, the Rules of Evidence determined that it was unsafe to convict on the uncorroborated evidence of a child (in practice under the age of 6) again reducing the ability of child victims to make their voice heard. However, the Court of Appeal subsequently ruled that evidence could be given by children of any age if they could understand the need to tell the truth. More recently, the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 introduced a presumption of 'competency' for all witnesses, children included, except where there were queries over their ability either to understand the questions or give comprehensible answers. However, there is a long way to go before courts can be persuaded to take fully into account the developmental stages of childhood (Erikson, 1968), how these can affect child perceptions, levels of understanding and articulacy, and how they may be profoundly damaged by prolonged victimisation (Cameron, 2000).

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority is a non-departmental public body, which administers the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme for England, Scotland and Wales. Under this scheme, children of parents or carers who have died as a result of their criminal injuries can claim an award for 'loss of parental services', for 'fatal injury' and 'dependency'. The numbers of claims made by adult former victims of child abuse are also steadily climbing. These measures are reinforced by Article 39 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 which requires that all appropriate measures be taken to promote the physical and psychological recovery and social integration of child victims. However, where children make a claim, the claims officer will make an award only where he (*sic*) is satisfied that it would not be against his (*sic*) interest for an award to be made. While this is intended as a protective measure, in the wrong hands it could be misapplied.

Power Relations Between Societies and Their Children

Beyond the formal, legalised responses which society makes to its child victims are other powerful responses, to be found for example in the media, which offers very mixed messages about crime, particularly violent crime. In the UK, this has impacted upon the populace as a consequence of public inquiry either because of abusive practices in children's homes, as discussed earlier; or because of the mismanagement of suspected child abuse; or because of child death within or outside the family. High profile examples in respect of the latter three arenas have included: Cleveland, where large numbers of children suspected of having been abused were taken into care, and the social work and health professionals vilified for unwarranted interference (Butler-Sloss, 1988); the long-term abuse and eventual murders in their families of Jasmine Beckford (Blom-Cooper, 1985) and Victoria Climbié (Laming, 2003), where professionals were accused of neglecting their duty of intervention; and the murders in Soham of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman, where the failure of professionals to communicate and liaise effectively about a known sex offender was highlighted (Bichard, 2004).

According to the particular circumstances, then, those with professional responsibility have been criticised either for intervening too much or intervening too little. Public feeling seemingly runs as high about the increase of state interference in domestic and family life as it does about that same state's failure to prevent the death or abuse of a child. Cleveland or Climbié which is worse? Either way, the child is the victim.

Power relations within and beyond UK societies have similarly institutionalised the victimisation of children. For example, Governmental regimes predicated upon political oppressions have both portrayed violence as a behavioural norm for children and engaged them in it. In other parts of the world, child soldiers are the epitome of state-sanctioned violence for the young. The apartheid regime in South Africa prompted strikes and demonstrations by school children against 'Bantu Education' in 1976; the response of the authorities was to shoot them. In the Western world, children in Northern Ireland lived through the longest period of sustained conflict in recent times. In all these situations, children died, witnessed death, were maimed, lost parents through imprisonment, were themselves imprisoned and saw or used guns in their daily lives.

Further, violence is enshrined in the response of a range of justice systems to criminalised anti-social behaviour - that is to say torture and other forms of physical retribution, and capital punishment - all of which, in some countries, may be applied to children and young people, despite wide ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989. Similarly, reports from the Bureau of International Labor Affairs (1996, 1998) emphasise that mental and physical violence to victims of child prostitution and child labour is to be seen not only in Asia, the Far East, Central and South America, as popularly imagined, but also in parts of the 'developed' world - Europe, North America and Australia. Physical violence between family members is frequently seen as normal for many societies (Gelles and Straus, 1988).

At national and international levels, then, these issues raise fundamental questions about how children experience power and its applications. As John (2003) notes, democracies are created both in the public sphere and within the emotional intimacies of the family. In these settings, without either fully developed cognitive skills or legal standing, it is highly problematic for children to engage in the process of recognising and realising their rightful autonomy and agency.

Some Outcomes of Victimisation as a Child

The foregoing sections have described the structural settings in which children are most likely to become victims. The aetiology of their victimisation may produce a range of outcomes either within these settings as they become older, or beyond

Them when they reach adulthood. As one writer observes, 'Children are both victims and survivors of many violent acts.... whether within the family or outside it' (Yule 1993: 153).

In terms of bullying which frequently takes place in school settings, there is evidence to suggest that those most likely to become bullies tend to live with (male) models of dominance and aggression who abused their power over their children (Bowers *et al.* 1992). Similarly it has been suggested that children who have been sexually abused and subjected to the abuse of authority coupled with the perversion of physical intimacy are conditioned to respond along a domination/submission continuum (Sanderson, 1992). Bagley and King in their search for the meaning that attaches to sexual abuse in childhood provide a wide range of published personal accounts of such abuse, most of which have in common feelings of anger, rage and hate which, set against positions of utter powerlessness, have to be internalised but nevertheless endure over time and surface in a variety of ways during adolescence or adulthood. (Bagley and King, 1991). Earlier, Miller had studied the childhoods of some authoritarian personalities and in the case of Hitler, for example, who was responsible for mass oppression and murder, had traced his actions back to a physically emotionally (and possibly sexually) abusive father who persistently humiliated the young Adolf (Miller, 1987). Such well-organised and unrelenting compulsive destruction has been described as narcissistic rage, an extreme form of self-defensive revenge against early childhood helplessness and humiliation (Kohut, 1985; Wolf, 1988).

If young people have been denied their victim status by having no-one to confide in about what has happened to them then it is possible that they will seek redress by finding their own form of domination, sometimes within the family but, where this is unfeasible, sometimes also as a 'displacement' activity beyond it. In attempting to illustrate the latter form of redress Miller, for example, offers the speculation that millions of Jews might have escaped persecution if Hitler had had children of his own upon whom he could have taken revenge for his father's abuse of him (Miller, 1987). Although speculative, this is nevertheless a sobering thought which, again, leads back to a realisation of the crucial nature of preventive, protective action for victims of child abuse. It is also a further reminder that many societal structures render it more difficult than it should be for an abusive act against a child to merit a formal response. As two authors writing about child victims aver, 'Routine acts of minor violence such as bullying, chastisement or assault appear resistant to being defined as criminal when committed against children'. (Morgan and Zedner, 1992: 22).

In more extreme cases of abuse, children have been likened to hostages or to concentration camp inmates whose 'captors' are also their significant attachment

Figures and whose means of survival will often be a direct function of the only relationship dynamic they know - that of the captor/hostage relationship (Goddard and Stanley, 1994). In such circumstances it seems not implausible that without any intervention to tell them otherwise, children may come to believe that to take 'captives' for the purpose of physical, sexual and emotional abuse is the norm for adult behaviour. At the extreme of this spectrum (i.e. with no mediating factor to intervene) the victim may seek to become the survivor by finding her or his own victim to dominate in turn.

Studies of violent young people in a range of countries have shown how the oppressed may evolve into the oppressor and the victim and the offender become located in one single, damaged young person (e.g. Boswell 1995, 1996, 2000 in the UK; Widom and White, 1997, in the United States; Wedge, Boswell and Dissel, 2000 in South Africa). Although there are clearly differences which relate to cultural and political variables, these studies show remarkably similar retrospective patterns in terms of earlier traumatic experiences. The UK study, for example, found that 72% of children sentenced between the ages of 10 and 17 years inclusive for murder and other grave crimes had experienced abuse of some kind - physical, sexual, emotional or combinations thereof; 57% had experienced traumatic loss of a close family member or friend (Boswell, 1995, 1996).

Indeed there seems little doubt that childhood abuse and loss, when no effective opportunity is provided for the child to make sense of these experiences, constitutes unresolved trauma which is likely to manifest itself in some way at a later date. Many children become depressed, disturbed, violent or all three, girls tending to internalise and boys to externalise their responses (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Working With Those Who Are, or Have Been, Child Victims

Henry Kempe, who first identified the 'battered child' syndrome over four decades ago, pointed out in 1978 that the first stage of addressing the problem is to recognise the denial that it exists other than in 'people not like us' (Kempe, 1978). Society holds dear its warm images of childhood play, happiness and innocence. As another author observes:

Our culture's view of childhood is built upon images of sweet-smelling babies, chubby hands dragging teddies, pony rides, science projects, piano lessons, prom dresses and graduation ceremonies. Sadly, for many children, the list would be more accurate if it included broken bones, chipped teeth, black eyes, burns, unexplained vaginal or anal infections, night terrors, empty stomachs and lonely hearts.

(Everett and Gallop, 2001:3)

In a critique of issues and findings relating to childhood abuse, one author has pointed out that 'one reason why professionals did not believe that children were subject to physical or sexual abuse, or suffered from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) was simply that they never asked them!' (Yule, 1993: 165). Yule's view confirmed an earlier study of 105 hospitalised psychiatric patients, which found that 51% of them had been sexually abused in childhood or adolescence, but that in the majority of these cases hospital staff were unaware of the sexual abuse (Craine et al. 1988). Further, only 20% of the abused patients believed that they had received adequate treatment for their abusive experiences. Everett and Gallop, who make the important point that 'the denial of abuse can also mean the denial of recovery' (2001:4), point to a series of systemic barriers which cause society to suppress or ignore the existence of child abuse. Broadly, these may be represented as follows:

- The family as sacred
- Authority should not be questioned
- Violence is normal
- The victim is at fault
- We are not our brother's (or our sister's) keepers
- Gender stereotypes
- Taboo subjects
- Nature versus nurture
- Finding the words (to name the unpalatable)

These issues have all been touched upon in previous sections and are more or less self-explanatory. What is important, here, is for professionals and policy-makers to consider how these barriers may impinge upon both society's and their own attitudes and behaviour towards children who have been victimised in any way and to seek ways of raising the visibility and voices of those children.

Conclusion

This paper has critically reflected on the topic of child victims with the intention of highlighting gaps and anomalies in the framework of statistical, legislative and societal responses which surround them. Noting, in particular, the need for improved interprofessional working and for sound preventive measures, three main suggestions are now offered for improving the quality of professional and policy responses in the process of working effectively with child victims.

Firstly, those likely to be in formal contact with children, such as health and social care professionals and teachers must be furnished with a firm knowledge base about the nature of the trauma which can follow childhood victimisation, and also acquire the relevant skills to make accurate assessments which lead to appropriate treatment and measures which will prevent adverse responses.

An important example of such a knowledge base is the growing body of work on post-traumatic stress disorder (Wilson & Raphael, 1993) which confirms that children suffer the after-effects of traumatic stress in the same way as adults. The set of criteria commonly used to establish whether an individual is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is set out by the American Psychiatric Association (2000). Professionals need to be equipped with the knowledge which will help them recognise these signs and to be provided with the training and resources which will enable them to intervene appropriately before behaviour manifestations along the risk continuum become entrenched within young adulthood.

Secondly, children and young people who have been victimised, abused and otherwise traumatised need communities which support them by validating rather than ignoring their experiences, making it more acceptable for them to report, describe and discuss these traumatic events, and placing emphasis on prevention, also offering support to parents in difficulty, and providing parenting classes in schools. As Morgan and Zedner observe:

Child victims and their families have a diversity of needs. Many of them could best be met by the development of child-centred assistance. It is important that children be given a voice to express their feelings, needs and wishes. Listening to child victims themselves will allow criminal justice and support agencies to take greater account of their needs and, in doing so, to respond more effectively.....There should be far greater public awareness of the needs of child victims, better publicity about possible sources of support, improved interagency co-operation, and easier accessibility for victims seeking help for themselves.

(Morgan and Zedner, 1992:183)

Such awareness would require a genuine commitment to interprofessional working, possibly even beginning with interprofessional training so that commonalities rather than differences are emphasised, and the risk of children falling through professional safety nets, because vital information has not been shared, is eradicated. It would also require a much more developmental perspective on child victims. 'Understanding and appreciating the emotional and developmental levels of children and the developmental issues they are experiencing are extremely important first steps when assessing the impact of stress and crises'. (Zubenko, 2002). It would further be enhanced by the introduction of a national database integrating annual figures on all officially reported crimes and forms of abuse

committed against children, supplemented with regular national studies to assess the undoubtedly high levels of unreported direct and indirect victimisation of this age group. Though the role of the Children's Commissioner for England, due to take up post in April 2005, is widely seen as insufficiently independent of Government, this is a development which could very usefully be instigated by the post-holder. The new independent Commissioner for Victims, to be appointed under the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004, might also take this work forward.

Finally, there is a need for full integration of research programmes into the process of policy formulation and effective application in the justice system for young people. Such a process should take into account the views of professionals, the public, and the young victims themselves, moving society towards a greater sense of collective responsibility in the process. It is necessary to ensure that what Saunders (2003) refers to as the 'Balkanisation' of the professionals and the academics is diffused by a framework of interdisciplinary working and sharing of information about the complex and under-studied phenomenon that is childhood victimisation.

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