

SUMMARY

Introduction

Policy and academic attention to in policy and science has grown strongly in the past three decades. Where victims of crime were once neglected by the criminal justice system, today this is no longer true. Victims have secured rights within the criminal justice system and services are on offer to meet their needs.

The recent policy initiative 'Slachtoffers centraal' is a logical next step in the development of the position of victims of crime. The plan aims to increase the quality of victim assistance and to develop more diversified services for different groups of victims. The initiative consists of three components. The first is the Empowerment Victim in Criminal Proceedings Act which will introduce a separate section in the Dutch Code of Criminal Procedure devoted specifically to victims. Secondly, victims of severe, violent crimes will be offered additional rights and possibilities, such as the (oral) victim impact statement, legal aid, free of charge and a personal meeting with the prosecutor. Thirdly, the quality of existing services will be upgraded, in part by improving education facilities for those tasked with providing victim assistance, but also by defining clear and relevant criteria for the quality of victim assistance and finding methods to accurately gauge this quality.

Earlier attempts to assess the quality of victim assistance through satisfaction surveys delivered insufficient information for policy development. This is mainly due to general problems with satisfaction surveys, which have also surfaced in other public services. The idea that a satisfaction score measures the quality of services does not take all relevant aspects of the subjective experience of quality into account. Such a score disregards for example, the effects of changes in the expected level of services, the question whether the right service is delivered and the importance of different aspects of service.

The Dutch Ministry of Justice is therefore in need of a research instrument that serves to measure the quality of victim assistance. For this reason the overall goal of this research project has been *to contribute to the development of a valid instrument to measure the quality of Dutch victim assistance as experienced by victims.*

The central notion of the research project is that experience of quality in victim assistance relates to the extent to which the services match victims' needs. Measuring this match entails querying victims' experiences with services and their relative importance, rather than measuring satisfaction. This approach is also used in health care services, and the model of the CQ-index (Consumer Quality index), which was developed for this sector, served as an example for this.

The contribution of this project to the development of quality measurement in victim assistance is twofold. In the first place, the components of this research project - an analysis of current literature, a qualitative research phase and a pilot internet survey - can serve to enhance understanding of factors relating to victims' experience of quality. Secondly, the project resulted in a concept measurement instrument that can be used in research into the quality of victim assistance. This instrument was used for the internet survey, in a first test of its applicability.

The project revolved around three questions. In the first place, which quality aspects do victims use in their judgement of victim assistance the different organisations (police, prosecution service, court services and Victim Support) involved in victim assistance?

The second question concerns the priority of different aspects of quality. Which aspects are most important to victims? What factors are correlated with or even determine the priority of different aspects of quality? The last question focuses on the concept measurement instrument. To what extent is it complete, useful and valid?

Methods

The project consisted of three phases. The first two, a literature review and a qualitative phase, resulted in a questionnaire. This was used for the third phase, a pilot internet survey, in which victims who recently contacted the prosecution service were asked to fill out the questionnaire.

Using the central notions of quality, supply and demand, the literature review surveys the relevant victimological research. Using a snowball search, the literature review provides a full overview of relevant aspects of quality in the research literature.

The qualitative research phase, which employed both focus-group and in-depth interviews with victims of crime, added to the results of the literature analysis. Furthermore, victims were specifically queried about the priority of different aspects of quality.

The pilot internet survey ascertained whether relevant aspects of quality needed to be added to the results of the previous phases and also reviewed the priority of the different aspects. In addition this phase evaluated the usefulness and validity of the questionnaire.

Results of the literature review

Quality

There are three victimological perspectives on quality: the justice perspective, the mental health perspective and the prevention perspective. In the justice perspective, quality for victims is viewed as adequate access to justice and the prevention of secondary victimisation. Central to this perspective are the theoretical notions of procedural justice, access to justice and the what is termed 'therapeutic jurisprudence'. In the mental health perspective, coping with the psychological consequences of victimisation is important and the methods involved aim to reduce the chance of the development of psychological complaints and to stimulate posttraumatic growth. The prevention perspective concerns the prevention of repeat victimisation, in particular for high-risk groups, such as victims of chronic domestic violence. The justice perspective is common to research into the quality of victim assistance, but this project incorporated notions from the other perspectives as well.

Demand

In this project, the victim's demand was translated into a needs framework. Victims' needs are important indicators of what they require from the system of victim assistance. The framework incorporates the three perspectives yet distinguishes between process and outcome needs. In the justice perspective this is a common division.

The process needs concern *respectful treatment, information* and *participation*. Participation is a complicated need. The literature reveals the importance of striking a balance between the advantages of participation and the potential risks of secondary victimisation.

The outcome needs relate to *acknowledgement, (material) compensation, security, coping with or reducing feelings of anxiety* and *retribution*. Different groups of victims may have different outcome needs. Victims of property crime often have a strong need for material compensation, while to victims of violent crime, security, coping with anxiety

and retribution matter greatly. Within groups, however, there is a large degree of diversity, and victims' needs also change over time.

Supply

Many organisations contribute to victim assistance. This project solely reviewed the most important actors: the police, the prosecution service, the court services and Victim Support.

The literature review resulted in a number of general observations about the supply side of victim assistance, which are all relevant for the measurement instrument. In the first place, the services delivered are contingent on the crime the victim has suffered. Secondly, people's overall assessment of criminal justice agencies is influenced by the service perception of victims. Thirdly, cooperation between criminal justice agencies and with organisations outside the victim care system is relevant for victims' experiences.

The analysis of the literature shows that the needs in the framework are relevant for each of the organisations. The content of *respectful* treatment does show some variation. Listening skills are more important for the police and the prosecution service than for the courts. The need for *information* is equally important across the board. It needs to be understandable, explain the criminal justice procedure, contain details of additional avenues for help and support, and assist victims to take action themselves. Gauging the services for victim participation is complicated. For instance, services – e.g., the written and oral victim impact statement and adhesion proceedings – are delivered jointly by the different organisations.

Acknowledgement is a need which is fulfilled, when other needs are. It coincides with respectful treatment, participation, compensation and/or retribution, and it will therefore not be referred to separately in the questionnaire. Material compensation is of course important for victims of property crimes, but also for other victims. The victim assistance organisations have different possibilities to meet this need. The police and the prosecution service can offer compensation mediation, the prosecution service and Victim Support are involved in adhesion proceedings and the judge can impose a compensation order. The need for *security* takes different shapes. For victims who run a real risk of repeat victimisation the actions taken to protect their security are sometimes literally a matter of life and death. A larger group of victims could benefit from advice from the police or Victim Support on how to prevent repeat victimisation. *Reducing feelings of anxiety* relates to the risk of secondary victimisation and security. Referral to, mental health or social work organisations is an important avenue for victim assistance to meet this need. In addition, Victim Support's own services help victims cope with their victimisation and reduce the chance of developing severe psychological complaints. Finally, there is the need for retribution. Investigating crime, arresting, prosecuting and convicting suspects and punishing offenders are all important to victims of crime.

Results of the qualitative phase

The qualitative research phase consisted of four focus-group and five in-depth interviews with 25 victims of crime.. The victims were contacted through the victim care unit of prosecution service and the regional branch of Victim Support both in Utrecht (the Netherlands). The interviews confirmed results of the literature analysis. The most important results for each of the organisations can be summarised as follows.

The respondents found it important to be treated respectfully by the police through timely response and a helpful and sympathetic attitude of police personnel. Information, concerning both organisations providing support and assistance and the criminal justice

procedure, was also rated highly. Referral to other organisations was mentioned by the respondents, as was the value of flexibility. Procedures should be adapted to meet the need of victims, which emphasises the need for victim participation.

The prosecution service proved to be relatively unknown. Therefore, information about its activities is important. Here too personal attention and participation options were much appreciated by victims. Some victims found the prosecution service to pay insufficient attention to their needs.

Acknowledgement is a key issue in the victims' relationship with the judiciary. This may come in the shape of respectful treatment, but the focus groups confirmed that the punishment imposed on the offender is also viewed as acknowledgement of the harm suffered by victims.

Victim Support's services meet victims' needs. Victims who did use these services were satisfied with them. The main issue is that victims are unfamiliar with Victim Support. As a consequence, they occasionally fail to use and benefit from its services.

Questionnaire

The project used the CQ-index of consumer perception of quality in health care,. Respondents were asked to score a list of quality indicators based on their own experiences. Their experiences are measured on a four-point Likert scale running from 1 (never) to 4 (always). They were then asked to indicate the importance of the same indicators, again using a four-point scale (1= not really important, 4 = of the utmost importance). The indicators are geared to the needs framework. A set of indicators covers each of the needs for the different organisations. Table S.1 provides an overview of the indicators used.

Table S.1 Respectful treatment indicators

<i>Did the staff of the ...</i>	<i>Police</i>	<i>Prosecution service</i>	<i>Judiciary</i>	<i>Victim Support</i>
<i>Respectful treatment</i>				
... treat you politely?	X	X	X	X
... respect your rights?	X	X	X	
... show interest in your personal story?	X	X	X	X
... take you seriously?	X	X	X	X
... show understanding of your situation?	X	X	X	X
... respect your privacy?	X			
... treat your personal details confidentially?	X	X	X	X
... leave you waiting a long time before you could report the crime?	X			
... show compassion?	X	X	X	X
... refer you to medical or mental health services?				X
... behave in a professional fashion?				X

Continuation table S.1 Respectful treatment indicators

<i>Did the staff of the ...</i>	<i>Police</i>	<i>Prosecution service</i>	<i>Judiciary</i>	<i>Victim Support</i>
Information				
... give you sufficient information concerning the reasons for decisions?	X	X	X	
... give you sufficient information concerning the next steps in the process?	X	X	X	
... give you sufficient information concerning follow-up help and support?	X			
... keep you abreast of developments in your case	X	X	X	
... give you sufficient information concerning the possibilities to receive compensation?	X	X	X	X
... give you sufficient information concerning your rights?	X	X	X	X
... give you sufficient information concerning the procedure at the level of the police, the prosecution services and the courts?				X
... give you practical support?				X
... give you legal advice?				X
Participation				
... took your wishes into account in their decisions?	X	X	X	
... give you the opportunity to give your opinion before they made their decision?	X	X	X	
... requested sufficient information to make an adequate decision?	X	X	X	
... tried to take your needs into account in their decision?	X	X	X	
Material compensation				
... made an earnest attempt to obtain compensation?	X	X	X	X
... made an adequate inventory of the damage you incurred?	X	X	X	X
Safety				
... increased your feelings of safety?	X	X	X	X
... advised you of ways to avoid future victimization?	X			X
... reduced the risk of repeat victimization?	X			
Coping with anxiety				
... decreased your feelings of anxiety?	X	X	X	X
... provided you with emotional support?				X

Continuation table S.1 Respectful treatment indicators

<i>Did the staff of the ...</i>	Police	Prosecution service	Judiciary	Victim Support
Retribution				
... made an adequate effort to solve the case?	X			
... made an adequate effort to arrest the suspect?	X			
... made an adequate effort to prosecute the suspect?		X		
... made an adequate effort to convict the suspect?		X		
... made an adequate effort to judge the offender?			X	
... made an adequate effort to punish the offender?			X	

The literature review and the qualitative research revealed a number of factors that are associated with victims' perceptions of quality. These were also included in the questionnaire: the crime suffered by the victim; the reason for reporting the crime; the time passed since victimisation; the victim's background characteristics; the victim's perception of the criminal justice system; and the outcome of the criminal trial.

Results quantitative phase

Response to survey

The survey respondents were contacted through the prosecution service in Utrecht a sample of 800 persons who had recently reported a crime. 110 consented to participate, (response rate: 14%). 17 of these did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the survey, so the survey was completed by 93 victims of crime. This number was lower still for questions about the Prosecution Service, the judiciary and Victim Support. The small number of respondents necessitates cautious interpretation of the results made it impossible to ascertain the relationship between the explanatory factors and the quality indicators.

Young victims and ethnic minorities were underrepresented in the survey. For most factors relating to the criminal justice system the sample closely resembled the results from previous research and/or registrations. This was not the case for the use of the oral and written victim impact statements; both were heavily overrepresented in the sample.

Results of the quality indicators

The most important results of the survey can be summarised as follows:

- The list of quality indicators is complete. The respondents were explicitly asked to mention aspects that were missing from the list. This did not necessitate inclusion of additional indicators.
- The items included in the questionnaire are important for the victims' assessment of quality in victim assistance. Nearly all indicators were considered to be very important.
- According to the respondents, the most important aspects of the services of the police, the prosecution service and the judiciary are related to retribution. The results reveal this to be of the utmost importance to nearly all victims, in particular victims of violent crime.

- It proved difficult for some victims to discern the tasks and responsibilities of the different organisations involved; complaints about the treatment by the prosecution service or the judiciary were addressed to the police, and Victim Support was regularly confused with legal aid or the Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund.

Overall conclusions

Quality aspects

The framework of victims' needs developed in the project sufficiently covers the victims' 'demand' for victim assistance. It includes the process needs for respectful treatment, information and participation, and the outcome needs for compensation, security, coping with feelings of anxiety, and retribution. Neither the interviews nor the pilot internet survey revealed the necessity to include additional aspects. The results of both research phases confirmed the importance of including the needs in the framework. All of them were considered to be very important by the respondents.

Priority of aspects

The survey queried victims about their experiences with the aspects of quality and their relative importance. This bypassed a number of problems of satisfaction research and also made it possible allows us to ascertain the priority of the different quality aspects. The first test, which was conducted using the internet survey, revealed that aspects relating to retribution were considered to be most important by most victims. The other aspects of quality could not be ranked using the results of the survey. The number of participants was too small, as were the differences between the importance scores.

Gauging the questionnaire

The concept measurement instrument proved to be complete in the sense that it contains the most important needs of victims. The small number of respondents does not allow conclusions about the explanatory factors. The questionnaire proved useful as a tool to measure assessment of the quality of victim assistance by victims. The method, which involved respondents reflecting on their experience with and the relative importance of various aspects of quality, delivered more relevant information than satisfaction surveys. The priority of various aspects of quality, the existence of quality gaps (items of high importance, but with poor results) and the explanation for differences between victims may be ascertained with the questionnaire. However, in terms of practicability there is room for improvement. The response rate was too low and must be increased in follow-up research.

The response rate also impacts the validity. The results may be affected by selection bias, although the sample resembled findings from previous research. In any case efforts should be made to increase the proportion of young victims and victims from ethnic minorities. In addition a number of items in the questionnaire were not sufficiently clear to all respondents. The answers reveal that some respondents attribute services to other organisations than those responsible for providing them. In addition, more attention needs to be paid to describing the services that are available to victims. Finally, many victims appeared to understand contact strictly in the sense of face-to-face contact. This term needs further explanation in follow-up research.