



POLICE KNOWLEDGE OF VICTIMS' NEEDS



Andis Rinkevics,
Chief of Prevention Unit, State Police of Latvia

Dace Landmane,
Chief Inspector, State Police of Latvia

Abstract: crime victims have different needs when turning to the police. Most of the needs of victims have long been studied. However, practical studies on police officers' understanding of victims' needs are lacking. A practical study was therefore conducted by the State Police of Latvia in 2012 ⁽¹⁾. Crime victims' and police officers' samples were compared, so as to analyse and understand the victims' critical needs. Based on the results of this research, a specific training programme for police officers was developed.

Keywords: police, crime victims, victims' needs.

1. INTRODUCTION

Victims have several needs when a criminal offence is committed. As first responders, police officers are the professionals who must have sound knowledge about those needs. Professional support by the police will help a victim to cope with a crime better and will make the victim more willing to cooperate during the investigation process. Law enforcement experts have identified seven main needs, i.e. the need for safety, support, information, access, continuity, voice, and justice ⁽²⁾. However, special attention must be paid to three critical needs — safety, support and information. These

three needs are particularly important during the first contact between the victim and police officer.

The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between police professionalism, the victim's initial needs (safety, support and information) and the victim's satisfaction with the first police response.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

Multiple regression analysis was used for the study ⁽³⁾. A specific questionnaire was designed to assess the victims' needs when first contacting

⁽¹⁾ The research was conducted with the financial support of the European Commission's specific programme, 'Criminal Justice', and the implementing project, 'Cutting secondary victimisation in the State Police of Latvia'. Researchers of the project were Dace Landmane and Andis Rinkevics.

⁽²⁾ IACP National Law Enforcement Policy Center (2010), 'Response to Victims of Crime', Pieejams: <http://www.theiacp.org/portals/0/pdfs/ResponsetoVictimsofCrimePaper.pdf>

⁽³⁾ An SPSS macro designed for multiple mediation models was used to test the indirect effects and paths analysis. Thus, bootstrapping procedures were used to obtain estimates of the indirect effects and to test their significance by using confidence interval. If the 95 % bias-corrected confidence interval for the parameter estimate did not contain zero, then the indirect effect was statistically significant and mediation was demonstrated. Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2008), 'Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models', *Behavior Research Methods*, Vol. 40, pp. 879–891.



the police. The study was conducted at a police station in Latvia. Police officers and victims were both questioned. This comparative survey was part of a larger crime victim research conducted by the State Police of Latvia. A special survey was adapted to assess three factors (safety, support and information), professionalism, and satisfaction with the police:

- Police professionalism was independent variable. Scale of police professionalism — the Cronbach's alpha for this variable was 0.89 (victims: $M=4.43$, $SD=1.02$; police officers: $M=4.51$, $SD=0.59$).
- Victims' needs were for mediators. Questionnaire on victims' needs — the Cronbach's alpha for each factors were as follows: safety ($\alpha=0.90$), support ($\alpha=0.84$) and information ($\alpha=0.86$).
- Satisfaction with first response of the police was dependent variable. Victims were asked:

'In general, how satisfied were you with the police's first response?' ($M=4.22$, $SD=1.27$). Police officers were asked: 'In general, how satisfied were victims with your first response?' ($M=4.53$, $SD=0.71$).

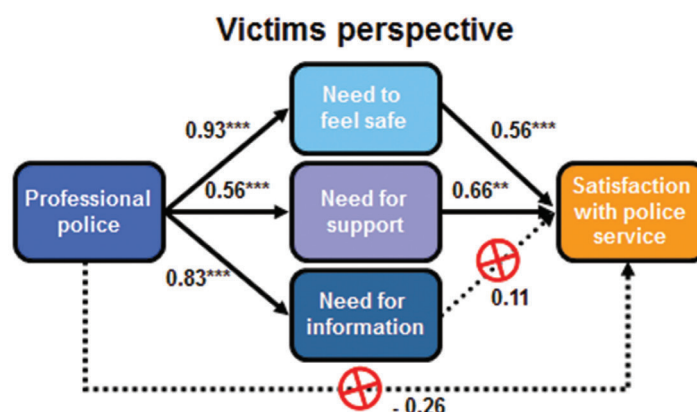
3. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The connection between all factors was analysed in the victim and police samples using multiple regression analysis.

Samples from victims: 57 victims ranged in age from 18 to 85 ($M=47.62$, $SD=18.46$), 42.1 % male and 57.9 % female.

The survey's results in the victims' samples revealed that a professional police force has to provide a sense of safety, support and information (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: A multiple mediation model of police professionalism and satisfaction with police services through attributions for victim needs factors in victim samples (N=57)



Note: The numbers in the figure represent standardised regression coefficients derived from bootstrap procedure. Group membership (police officers and crime victims) was controlled: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Attributions for victim needs factors were predicted from police professionalism, revealing that police professionalism leads to information, support and safety attributions. Next, satisfaction with the police services was looked at from the attributions for victims' needs. The results showed that safety and support attributions lead to satisfaction with police services. However, information attributions do not lead to victim satisfaction with police services. Finally, police professionalism resulting in satisfaction with police services was assessed. It was shown that police professionalism alone (without victim needs attributions) does not result in victims being satisfied with police services.

In other words, if a sense of safety and support are provided to victims, this will result in victim satisfaction with the police services. Analysis of the third factor — need for information — revealed that information is an important factor to explain police professionalism. However, although crime victims are keen to get information from the police (steps taken following an offence, case progress, etc.) this factor does not influence the victim's satisfaction towards the police. This is a very important conclusion for police managers and other stakeholders. It clearly indicates that an increased level of information, on its own, will not increase victim satisfaction with the police. What victims

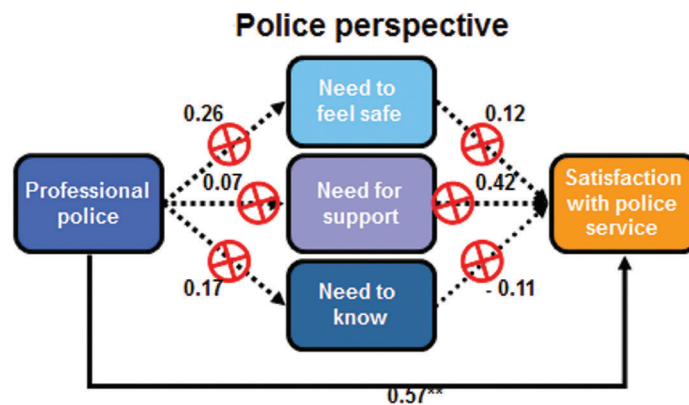


expect from the police as primary duties are safety and support. Similar conclusions can be made by taking a look at the relationship between police professionalism and victim satisfaction with the police. Data of study indicated that a professional police response won't directly influence victim satisfaction with the police services. However, victims believe that the police act professionally only if all three critical needs are provided.

Police sample: 49 police officers ranged in age from 23 to 48 ($M=33.2$, $SD=6.72$), 53.1 % male and 57.9 % female.

Survey results in police sample revealed that professional police response is not linked with a sense of safety, support and information to crime victims (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: A multiple mediation model of police professionalism and satisfaction with police services through attributions for victim needs factors in police sample (N=49)



Note: The numbers in the figure represent standardised regression coefficients derived from bootstrap procedure. Group membership (police officers and crime victims) was controlled: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Attributions for victim needs factors were predicted from police professionalism, revealing that police professionalism does not lead to information attributions (need to know), support attributions and safety attributions. Likewise, satisfaction with the police services was predicted from the attributions for the needs of victims. The results showed that safety attributions, support attributions and information attributions (need to know) don't result in satisfaction with police services. However, assessing police professionalism for showing satisfaction with police services revealed that police professionalism leads to victims' satisfaction with police services.

In other words, police officers believe that victims need a professional police response; professional response to crime victims will thus result in victim satisfaction. However, police officers also believe that police professionalism does not lie in their ability to provide a sense of safety, support and information. From the police viewpoint, as a professional body, solving a case is the main criterion for police efficiency. Police officers have a false perception that a more effective police response will result in better-satisfied crime victims.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Research data clearly indicate the differences between police and victim perspectives. The difference between both perspectives is very significant. Both crime victims and police officers believe that a police professional response is important. However, the understanding of what a professional police response is differs in both samples. Whilst police officers believe that solving the case will make crime victims pleased with the police; for the crime victims, solving the case, although important, is only one of the factors required to make them satisfied with the police services. In their opinion, the police should also provide a sense of safety, support, and information.

The conclusions of the study were used to develop a special training programme for police officers to improve their knowledge and skills in responding to crime victims. Special attention is paid on the methods to address three critical needs of victims in this programme.