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# Specific Roles and Responsibilities of the Police in Victim Assistance: Police Officers' View

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## **Purpose:**

The purpose of this research was to assess police officers' views and their current practice in dealing with victims and to test differences in their attitudes regarding their gender, personal experience of victimization and years of professional experience.

## **Design/Methods/Approach:**

A questionnaire based on the UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power was applied to two generations of police officers (N=155), who attended the victimology course. Descriptive statistics, discriminant analysis and chi-square test were used.

## **Findings:**

Police officers mostly agree with good standards in treating victims' rights. Discriminant analysis revealed no significant difference regarding police officers' gender and personal experience of victimisation. Chi-square test revealed differences regarding years of professional experience in 3 of 31 analyzed items.

## **Research limitations/implications:**

The results are not generalizable since convenient sample was used. Another question to be considered is police officers' attendance of the victimology course (although the questionnaire was carried out on the first class of students), which might lead police officers into giving socially desirable answers.

## **Practical implications:**

This research gives valuable information to police strategic structures regarding the evaluation of the current practice and the creation of protocols and education programs.

## **Originality/Value:**

This is the first research on this topic in Croatia. It gives insight into police officers' views, and their current practice in treating victims.

**UDC:** 351.74/.76:343.988

**Keywords:** police officers, crime victims, attitudes, social expectations

## Posebne vloge in odgovornost policije pri pomoči žrtvam: stališča policistov

### Namen prispevka:

Namen te raziskave je bil oceniti stališča policistov glede njihove sedanje prakse pri delu z žrtvami in preveriti razlike v njihovih stališčih glede na spol, osebne izkušnje viktimizacije in število let poklicnih izkušenj.

### Metode:

Za anektiranje dveh generacij policistov (N=155), ki so se udeležili tečaja viktimologije, je bil uporabljen vprašalnik, ki temelji na Deklaraciji ZN o osnovnih načelih pravičnosti za žrtve kaznivih dejanj ali zlorabe moči. Uporabljeni so bili opisna statistika, diskriminantna analiza in  $\chi^2$  test.

### Ugotovitve:

Policisti se v glavnem strinjajo, da se pri obravnavanju pravic žrtev uporabljajo dobri standardi. Diskriminantna analiza ni pokazala pomembnih razlik glede spola in osebnih izkušenj viktimizacije policistov. Glede števila let poklicnih izkušenj policistov pa je  $\chi^2$  test pokazal razlike v treh od enaintridesetih analiziranih primerov.

### Omejitve/uporabnost raziskave:

Ker je bil uporabljen priložnostni vzorec, rezultatov ni mogoče posploševati. Potrebno bi bilo upoštevati dejstvo, da so bili policisti slušatelji pri predmetu Viktimologija (čeprav je bilo anketiranje izvedeno na začetku predavanj), kar pa bi lahko privedlo do tega, da so policisti odgovarjali družbeno zaželeno.

### Praktična uporabnost:

Raziskava nudi dragocene informacije policijskemu vodstvu na strateški ravni pri ocenjevanju sedanje prakse in pri oblikovanju protokolov in izobraževalnih programov.

### Izvirnost/pomembnost prispevka:

To je prva raziskava na to temo na Hrvaškem. Nudi vpogled v stališča policistov in njihovo sedanjo prakso pri obravnavanju žrtev.

**UDK: 351.74/.76:343.988**

**Ključne besede:** policisti, žrtve kaznivih dejanj, stališča, socialna pričakovanja

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Crime victims are gaining more attention worldwide. Christie (2010) recognizes growing victim movements as a natural consequence of modernity in which victims might feel they are forgotten in the legal process. The police are very important since they are the first state agency contacted by victims.

The police have an important role in victims' experiences after a criminal victimization – public opinion and personal attitudes about police can determine victims' willingness to report victimization and influence the quality of information about the crime and the perpetrator and can serve as a protective or risk factor in the victims' healing process. Police officers are front line officers who can have an

important impact on victims' current psychological status and their understanding and dealing with the criminal justice system. They can provide a significant support to the victim and refer her or him to a specific service for professional help.

Do police officers really fulfil those expectations? As stated in the Handbook on Justice for Victims, "historically, police have not been provided with adequate training regarding the impact of violent crime on victims and methods of ensuring that victims are informed of their rights and referred to essential services. As a result, under-trained police have often been insufficiently sensitive when coming into contact with emotionally distraught victims, which has impaired victim satisfaction and undermined the confidence of victims and their willingness to participate in the criminal justice process" (United Nation Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention [UNODCCP], 1999).

The importance of victim protection and assistance (not only from the policing perspective) is stipulated in the Salvador Declaration on Comprehensive Strategies for Global Challenges (United Nation [UN], 2010). In order to improve policies and procedures, it is important to assess current practice.

There is an increasing number of studies that explore different aspects of police dealing with victims: the impact of police behaviour on victim reports (Hickman & Simpson, 2003), victims inclination to provide or omit information during the interview (Holmberg, 2004), crime victims' satisfaction with police services (Tewksbury & West, 2001; Dvoršek, Maver, & Meško, 2006), police attitudes and treatment of domestic violence victims (Size & Saunders, 1986; Apsler, Cummins, & Carl, 2003; Robinson & Stroshine, 2005; Russell & Light, 2006; Corcoran & Allen, 2005), police information service for crime victims (Newburn & Merry, 1990; Fritsch, Caeti, Tobolowski, & Taylor, 2004), the role of stereotypes in police reporting (Du Mont, Miller, & Myhr, 2003).

## **2 SPECIFIC ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE POLICE IN VICTIM ASSISTANCE: TO SERVE AND PROTECT**

### **2.1 Specific Roles and Responsibilities of the Police**

To carry out the entrusted role in the widest sense means to fulfil the expectations of the one who entrusted the role. Children expect to receive love and care from their parents, society expects parents not to neglect their children but to do everything they can to turn them into responsible members of society. When parents live up to these expectations, they play their parental role. Just as doctors fulfil their role when they act according to the patient's expectations i.e. when they take care of the patient's health by doing their work professionally, or just as in a wider sense health institutions fulfil citizens' expectations by taking care of their health, that is how the police fulfil citizens' expectations by taking care of their safety i.e. by realizing the role society entrusted them with.

It is almost impossible to fulfil the expectations of all citizens, because some would like to see a policeman everywhere, while others would experience that situation as a 'police state'. Some citizens expect policemen to act only when things

go wrong, while some are glad to see a policeman talking to citizens about daily sports and political events. Many citizens think the street is no place for the police when things are normal, but that they need to jump in when things run out of control. In case the police fail to appear instantaneously when necessary, they will complain the police are not doing their job.

## **2.2 Specific Roles and Responsibilities of the Police: To Serve and Protect**

Serving highly professionally and ethically and protecting devotedly do not present mere ideal expectations from the police, but a formally accepted action strategy in most democratic societies of today. These societies attribute the highest value, at least declaratively, to man, his or her personality, and freedom from coercion, freedom of choice, and equality of all. Also, the rights belonging to man only because he or she is man – human rights, and the rights guaranteed by the fact of belonging to an organized social community - civil or citizens' rights are accentuated. Besides, contemporary man is becoming increasingly aware that we all breathe the same air, walk on the same ground, and drink the same water – which is to say that total life on the planet, and consequently the life of each and every of us, depends on whether we are aware of our personal role in the protection of life from the logic of destruction and exploitation.

This leads to a conclusion that man's dignity, human rights, and the total quality of life on the planet form the very basis of every society. Because these values are non-renewable and irrecoverable, they have to be seen as basic and original to every form of sociability. This means that every particular interest (economic, political, cultural, individual...) can be justified only if it is aimed at protecting and improving man's life and dignity, as well as at protecting the ecosystem both within national boundaries and globally. Clearly, the values present the basic framework within which ideal forms of life can be recognized, in spite of the frequently different or even contradictory reality.

A problem worth of research attention arises from interspaces between the ideal and the real, socially sustainable and unsustainable, and it is in connection with sociological conceptualization of patterns forming the institution of police, the aim of which is to protect life as non-renewable and irrecoverable value. The institution of police is formed and developed by increasing the level of its structure complexity and retaining the same objective determined by man's need for safety. Man, an individual, gets to be integrated into various forms of communities and societies and that way realizes his or her social character – and the need for safety is thereby met by delegating it to the sociability form man is integrated in.

The purpose of the social institution of police is based on the permanent harmony between an individual need and a common imperative for safety, which is not only recognized by society but also promoted as a value. Social care for the safety of citizens is a structural answer to the universal human need for safety, and police service is likewise a universal form of social action in every society that recognizes safety of its members as a general value and a common interest. It is

in that sense possible to talk about safety as a social state in terms of the sum of individual rights and freedoms that do not mutually exclude or contradict but complement each other, and about the perception of safety in terms of stable and permanent satisfaction by the subjective perception of peace and order in everyday interactions.

As long as they serve citizens and protect them, raising both the perception and the objective level of safety, and as long as they coordinate their activity within a state institution providing basic service to citizens, the police fulfil their social role i.e. realize the principle of sociability. The term sociability does not here refer only to mere presence of the police in society, or to senselessness of the existence of the police outside society. The sociability of the police also does not refer to a mechanical copy of specific cultural features of society's institutions, thus also the police. It is also not about super-political position of the police i.e. the professional ability of the police to position itself above various political interests and changes. The conformity of political activity with state interests also presents no purpose of the police. The sociability of the police finally refers to the permanent need for mutual functional interconnectedness of the police and society by common values and common action principles, which is expressed by the credo to serve and protect. That credo makes it clear that obedience is not owed to the possessors of social power because these actors use their power for the realization of their interests anyway, but precisely to the members of society with deficit of power, to the helpless i.e. victims.

### **2.3 Specific Roles and Responsibilities of the Police in Victim Assistance: to Serve and Protect**

A clear idea of moral rectitude of organized social power i.e. the police towards helping the victim can be found in the Bible. John the Baptist, a prophet belonging both to the Old and the New Testament, frequently delivers fierce criticism of hypocrisy and cruelty of authorities of the time and of all the people whose conscience is not pure enough to differentiate between right and wrong, justice and injustice, mercy and violence. In spite of fierceness, John teaches without reproach the police and soldiers of ancient Israel, who are worried because they are aware of the power placed in their hands as they are entitled to apply force daily, how to act in order to retain humanity and reputation before people and God, by explicating three principles:

1. "Do violence to no man", which could in affirmative terms be formulated as an appeal to become aware of the power they hold and to use it to help and protect people, to do good;
2. "Do not accuse any falsely" or simply "tell the truth". This is a warning that false testimony can lead to injustice instead of justice and cause evil instead of good. Also, one needs to stick to objective facts and disregard subjective evaluation;
3. "Be content with your wages" reminds not only of constant danger of bribery, but also presents an incentive for deeper consideration of what it means to pursue a police calling. One should in advance see clearly what is invested

and sacrificed, and what gained in return. Whoever is not ready to accept the ratio should stay away from the police service. Be at service at all times, protect others by exposing oneself, be aware of dangers and difficulties that frequently cannot be adequately remunerated and in spite of all that decide to accept police service with full awareness and responsibility – these present ideal expectations from the police.

All these would probably remain only ideal expectations were these only occasional words inspired by the mentioned excerpts from the New Testament, but these terms however can be found in the last few decades in official documents and planned action strategies of all police structures in democratic societies, and they present the basic content in the education of police officers. Also, just as we evaluate democratization level and humanity of a society by looking into the practice of respecting each individual member of a society (regardless of origin, affiliations, worldview, education, health, age, wealth, popularity), we evaluate professionalism, democratization level and humanity of the police by looking into their practice of treating the victim.

This paper attempts to give answer to whether the principle of victim-sensitivity in case of punishable acts, which has partially been studied in basic and specialist training of the police in the Republic of Croatia, is present in everyday police practice.

### **3 THE CROATIAN PERSPECTIVE**

The responsible rapport of police officers towards victims in the Republic of Croatia has a long tradition developed independently decades before the process of democratic transition began. Still, it was scattered into individual separate visions and presented an unsystematic institutional model, although even that helped the climate regarding the role and specific responsibility of police officers when meeting a victim to start changing once democratic changes were initiated.

Developmental attempts have been followed and complicated by a series of problems, and these difficulties are today only more visible and easier to define. Traditional patterns, stereotypes and prejudice towards victims are still among the most important factors inhibiting the raising of awareness concerning police responsibility towards victims. Traditional patterns, deeply rooted in pre-democratic period of development, are still significantly present in disputes and debates on what the basic social role of the police is. Is the first place occupied by the principle of repression and all values associated with it that focus the entire police activity on the perpetrator of crime? Or has the primary place in the period of democratic development finally been taken by the principle of prevention that is recognized and fulfilled in the to serve and protect principle, whereby the primary focus on the perpetrator gets to be replaced by the focus on citizens, who pay the highly professional service through tax and hence expect to receive it; the most prominent focus of all should thereby be put on an actual person in need of help i.e. the victim?



The next detectable ballast can be recognized in patriarchal mentality and the associated social organization that together with the first mentioned obstacle form a rigid conceptual structure that is hard to change as it is saturated with a series of stereotypes concerning the definition of who can and who cannot be a victim. These conceptions tend to be separated from the common sense or direct experience. It took us decades of experience and argumentation to realize that statistically highest danger of crime comes from the circle of the people close to the victim and that family holds the high first position among places dangerous for living, and it was an even slower process to raise awareness that marital and parental violence are the most frequent forms of violence, or that sexual abusers and their victims most frequently live in the same family. Within such network of traditional patterns and stereotypes, the main preconditions for reaching final conclusions and the consequential operational activities are getting rid of prejudice and acquiring desirable and ideologically unbiased critical perspective. It is necessary to remind in this context that the most frequent question posed to the victim of sexual violence until recently even in the most developed democratic countries has been about the clothes the victim wore/how she or he was dressed.

In any case, in spite of all inhibition factors, there was also a stimulus, a motivating factor – the real institutional effort to instil into the police practice in the Republic of Croatia the most efficient experiences concerning responsible attitude towards the victim. The experiences at matter have been developed in stable democratic environments, mostly in older EU member states and in Scandinavian societies. The development has become obvious first of all in numerous educational contents referring to basic police training, higher and specialist police education and regulations harmonized with the EU...

Last decade brought some changes in victim's position in Croatia due to legislative harmonization with EU standards and raised awareness on importance of victim issues. Recent reform of the Croatian Criminal Procedure Act (*Zakon o kaznenom postupku*, 2009) has introduced some changes regarding victims' position in criminal proceedings although Tomašević and Pajčić (2008) emphasize that "injured person, traditionally speaking, had much better position in Croatian criminal proceeding legislation than in other countries". New Croatian Criminal Procedure Act introduced the term "victim", beside the term "injured person", although there is some ambiguity in definitions. There is a novelty for sex crime victims and domestic violence victims– they can require that their interview (as a witness) is conducted in their home or other residence. Also, victims' rights are stated in the legislation. Sex crime victims<sup>1</sup> and child and younger juvenile – victims have some specific rights.

1 *Victim is defined as "a person who, because of committed criminal offence, suffers physical and emotional consequences, economic damage or significant violation of fundamental rights and freedoms". Injured person is defined as "any other person, beside victim, whose any personal or economic right is jeopardized by criminal offence and who participate in criminal proceeding as injured person".*

*Victim has a right to psychological and other professional help and support of body, organisation or institution that provides help for victims; right to participate in criminal proceedings as injured person; if victimized by a criminal offence punishable with a sentence of five and more years of prison, and if suffers from severe psychological and physical injuries, victim has a right to a coun-*

Legislative novelty is also the Law on Probation (Zakon o probaciji, 2009) which defines participation in an organization of help and support to victims, injured persons and their families as one of probation activities. There are other laws that provide specific protection to specific victims: Witness protection Act (Zakon o zaštiti svjedoka, 2003), Juvenile Court Act (Zakon o sudovima za mladež, 1997), The Law on the Protection from Family Violence (Zakon o zaštiti od nasilja u obitelji, 2003) Act on Financial Compensation to the Victims of Criminal Acts (Zakon o novčanoj naknadi žrtvama kaznenih djela, 2008).

Besides legal norms, there are several national strategies emphasizing specific problems and recognising specific victims: National Activity Plan for Children's Rights And Interest (2006-2012), National Strategy for Protection From Family Violence, Action Plan for Suppressing Peers Violence, National Program for Suppressing Trafficking in Human Beings, National Program for Suppressing Child Trafficking.

Police legislation is quite "general" in terms of dealing with victims. The Law on Police Tasks and Powers (Zakon o policijskim poslovima i ovlastima, 2009) defines crime victim's protection as one of police powers, and the protection of victims is mentioned in terms of securing a crime scene and the protection of endangered victims (related to Witness Protection Act [Zakon o zaštiti svjedoka], 2003).

In terms of special organizational improvements in victim services, some improvements have to be mentioned: establishment of the department for support to witnesses in war crime trials within the Ministry of Justice, The Witness Protection Unit within Ministry of Interior (for protected witnesses) and witness support offices in courts (as a result of UNDP Croatia program "Assistance in the development of a witness and victim support system in Croatia" witness support offices were established in five courts – link to those offices can be found on the main web site of the Ministry of Justice – [www.pravosudje.hr](http://www.pravosudje.hr)). Following the Law on Probation, a new directorate (Directorate for probation and victims' and witnesses' support) within Ministry of Justice has been established recently.

Some particular victim-related topics, written about in Croatian professional journals, mostly focused on specific victim types and specific procedures – initial interview with a child in an alleged sexual abuse case (Sladović Franz, 2001), a child as a witness (Hrabar & Kocijan-Hercigonja, 2000; Petö-Kujundžić, 2004), forensic interview with a child (Zorić, 2004), reasons for non-reporting a sex crime (Modly, 2000), medical examination of rape victim (Modly, 2004), police and family violence (Modly, 2001), the police role in child abuse cases (Stašević, 2003). There are few more general papers on victim protection and support (Borovec & Burazer,

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*sellor (on a state budget) before testifying at court and in claiming financial restitution; victim has a right to be informed about first action conducted by the police, public prosecutor's office, court or investigator.*

*Sex crime victim has a right to be interviewed by the police officer of the same gender, refuse to answer a question of strictly personal life, right to suggest interview via audio-video device, right to protection of personal data, right to require exclusion of the public.*

*Child – victim (less than 14 years of age) and younger juvenile – victim (14-16 years of age) have a right to attorney at state budget expenses, the right to protection of personal data and the right to exclusion of the public.*



2007; Ajduković, Mrčela, & Turković, 2007; Moslavac, 2008), normative changes in Croatian legislation (Tomašević & Pajčić, 2008; Brnetić, 2009), or victims' rights (Turković, 2004). There is a textbook on victimology (Šeparović, 1985), but no research papers on the police/victim relationship.

UNDP (Croatian office) and the Ministry of Justice ran a project "Assistance in the Development of Witness and Victim Support System" and conducted several surveys to assess victims' position in Croatian legal system. General conclusions are that police officers and judges need more education and training in order to meet victims' need for information, help and support (more on the project available on <http://www.undp.hr/show.jsp?page=51984>).

General impression of a victim position in the Croatian legal system is that partial mechanisms and standards have been established for the protection and support for the most vulnerable victims (children and minors, people with disabilities, elderly people) and for specific crime victims (trafficking in human beings, sex crime victims, domestic violence victims, organized crime victims). Criminal justice system (with police service as its front line) is still far more system-oriented than victim-oriented and thus reflects a traditional victim position according to which a victim is perceived as a source of valuable information for the state in pursuing and punishing the offender (since a criminal offence is still perceived as a violation of state laws – different approach from restorative justice paradigm). Besides normative standards, much more could be done in terms of better victim treatment and protection.

## 4 METHOD

### 4.1 Sample

A questionnaire was applied on two generations (academic year 2008/09 and 2009/10) of police officers (N=155) attending the victimology course on the 2nd year of graduate program „Criminal investigation“ at the Police College in Zagreb, Croatia. Police College in Zagreb is the only institution in Croatia certified to provide police higher education. The "Criminal Investigation" program is created for employees of the Ministry of Interior as a two-level program – the undergraduate (3 academic years) and the graduate program (2 academic years). Students are mostly part-time students, from different Croatian regions, with different police experiences and positions (some are at the operational, some on tactical and some on strategic level). Some students (removed from this sample) left the Ministry of Interior and work for some other state agencies.

As represented in Table 1, participants were dominantly male, 25-34 years old, majority working at police stations, in the criminal branch and almost one half of them have 11-20 years of total working experience.

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**Table 1:**  
Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

	n	%
Sex		
Male	127	84.7
Female	23	15.3
Total <sup>a</sup>	150	
Age		
>25	4	2.6
25-29	51	33.8
30-34	51	33.8
35-39	24	15.9
40-44	15	9.9
45-50	6	4.0
Total <sup>a</sup>	151	
Employment <sup>b</sup>		
General police directorate	13	8.6
County police	31	20.5
Police station	107	70.9
Total <sup>a</sup>	151	
Branch		
Uniformed police	44	28.4
Criminal police	56	36.1
Road traffic police	14	9.0
Special police force	41	26.5
Total	155	
Working experience (years) <sup>a</sup>		
1-5	37	24.2
6-10	27	17.6
11-20	74	48.4
20>	15	9.8
Total	153	

Note: a Differences because of the missing values

Note: b Police in Croatia have a pyramidal structure: General police directorate (in Zagreb), county police – under the authority of the General Police Directorate (20 county police offices in Croatia, following the administrative structure of Croatia) and police stations under the authority of the county police.

### 4.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was made out of 3 sets of variables: 1) 31 statements based on “UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power” (with the emphasis on police role in dealing with victims), 2) items on their current way of dealing with victims, training and knowledge in working with victims, victimization experience, and 3) socio-demographic variables.

### 4.3 Procedure

The questionnaire was carried out on a sample made of first class students after a short introduction to the course. Students were asked to answer the questions anonymously and voluntarily. At the end of the course they had a presentation of results for their group followed by a discussion of results.

## 5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics and frequency analysis (Tables 2 and 3) show that participants generally agree with good standards in treating crime victims – a right to compensation (94.8 %), opportunity to give victim impact statement at court (97.4 %), information about police procedure (92.9 %), information about how to protect evidence (91.0 %), escort to medical service (98.7 %), verbal referral to other agencies for help (92.9 %), establishing a good rapport with a victim (97.4 %), offender compensation for the damage (92.3 %) etc.

Some results are interesting and deserve special attention and explanation. 45.2 % of participants stated that victims shouldn't be trusted completely. When asked about this result, they explained that a police investigator has to keep a certain amount of doubt in order to detect false accusations.

Differences in written (60.6 %) or verbal (92.9 %) referral to other agencies that offer help for victims and differences in giving information about progress in police investigation (13 % in written, 67.5 % verbally and 32.5 % by phone) revealed participants' reluctance to provide written forms due to expressed constant lack of time and big load of written communication and administration.

General impression in these discussions on results is that participants favour victims' rights more when they perceive them as the responsibility of some other agency rather than their own. When discussing possibilities of their improvement of treating a victim, they often see difficulties (obstacles) in their immediate environment (insufficient staffing, insensitivity of their superiors, excessive workload, inadequate training, structure of the whole police organization etc.). Also, they tend to be more focused on „real police work“ (how to obtain evidence) rather than on overall victimization impact on victims and their welfare – they hold that social services should focus on these issues.

Nearly  $\frac{2}{3}$  of participants stated that sex crime victims should be interviewed by police officer of the same gender – they explained that the victim should get an opportunity to choose. According to the Criminal procedure act, sex crime victim has a right to be interviewed by the police officer of the same gender. This right was interpreted as a rule in a police practice. Some of the participants think this shouldn't be understood as a rule without asking victim about his/her preferences.

We expected a higher percentage of participants in favour of establishing a state fund for financial compensation for serious crime victims – some explained they thought of current possibilities (state economy).

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**Table 2:**  
Descriptive  
Statistics

	N	Mini- mum	Maxi- mum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Victims shouldn't be trusted completely.	155	1.00	5.00	2.9290	1.16836
Victims are often culpable for what happened.	153	1.00	5.00	4.0392	.82623
Victim should have the right to compensation.	155	1.00	5.00	1.4839	.73285
Victim should have an opportunity to give victim impact statement at court.	155	1.00	3.00	1.2839	.50651
Police procedure should be explained to victim.	155	1.00	4.00	1.5613	.75665
Victim should be informed about how to protect evidence	155	1.00	5.00	1.4968	.75914
Victim should be escorted to medical service if needed.	155	1.00	3.00	1.1806	.41827
Victim should be referred (in writing) to other agencies that can offer legal, medical or psychological help.	155	1.00	5.00	2.4516	1.27000
Victim should be referred (verbally) to other agencies that can offer legal, medical or psychological help.	155	1.00	5.00	1.5097	.75048
Victim of serious crime should be contacted few days after in order to check if assistance has been sought/ received.	155	1.00	5.00	2.0323	1.01559
It is necessary to establish protocols for proper treatment of specific types of victims (rape, family violence etc.)	155	1.00	5.00	1.4000	.67995
Sex crime victim should be interviewed by police officer of same gender.	155	1.00	5.00	2.5484	1.33967
Victims of violent crime can develop PTSD.	155	1.00	5.00	1.7226	.81810
Police contact with victims influences their confidence in the whole criminal justice system.	155	1.00	4.00	1.6065	.69783
Special techniques are needed in interviewing victims of serious crimes (attempted murder, robbery, rape).	155	1.00	4.00	1.4258	.60247
In order to obtain all relevant information, it's necessary to build a rapport with a victim.	154	1.00	4.00	1.4091	.58982
It's important to empathize with victim.	155	1.00	5.00	2.0903	1.00239
Each victim requires special approach.	155	1.00	4.00	1.6129	.72423
Personal participation in victimisation should be explained to victim.	154	1.00	5.00	4.5130	.74305
When evidence is not sufficient, victim should be advised not to file charges.	155	1.00	5.00	4.3742	1.04539

When damage is small or insignificant, victim should be advised not to file charges.	155	1.00	5.00	4.2323	1.05572
Victims should be informed that their experience isn't so terrible.	155	1.00	5.00	4.0645	.97819
Offender should (if possible) compensate the damage for victim.	155	1.00	5.00	1.4839	.79245
State should establish a fund for financial compensation for victims of serious crimes.	155	1.00	5.00	1.8065	1.05742
In order to testify in court, all possible assistance should be promised to victim.	155	1.00	5.00	2.4452	1.33457
Police should give more pieces of preventive information to citizens.	155	1.00	5.00	1.4710	.66752
Victims of serious crimes should be occasionally contacted (telephone call or in person) to check how they are doing.	155	1.00	5.00	2.3226	1.04406
During the interview, victim should have an opportunity to tell everything she or he thinks and feels.	155	1.00	4.00	1.3226	.60233
Victim should be informed (in writing) about progress in police investigation.	154	1.00	5.00	3.7403	1.08949
Victim should be informed (verbally) about progress in police investigation.	154	1.00	5.00	2.4091	1.15817
Victim should be informed (by phone) about progress in police investigation.	154	1.00	5.00	3.2662	1.21560
Valid N (listwise)	150				

Note: 1. strongly agree – 5. strongly disagree

	Item responses n (%)		
	Agree/ Strongly agree	Not sure	Disagree/ Strongly disagree
Victims shouldn't be trusted completely.	70 (45.2)	10 (6.5)	75 (48.4)
Victims are often culpable for what happened.	13 (8.5)	7 (4.6)	133 (86.9)
Victim should have the right to compensation.	147 (94.8)	4 (2.6)	4 (2.6)
Victim should have an opportunity to give victim impact statement at court.	151 (97.4)	4 (2.6)	0
Police procedure should be explained to victim.	144 (92.9)	4 (2.6)	7 (4.5)
Victim should be informed about how to protect evidence.	141 (91.0)	10 (6.5)	4 (2.6)
Victim should be escorted to medical service if needed.	153 (98.7)	2 (1.3)	0

**Table 3:**  
Frequencies  
and percentages  
after recoding 5  
categories to 3

## Specific Roles and Responsibilities of the Police in Victim Assistance: Police Officers' View

Victim should be referred (in writing) to other agencies that can offer legal, medical or psychological help.	94 (60.6)	22 (14.2)	39 (25.2)
Victim should be referred (verbally) to other agencies that can offer legal, medical or psychological help.	144 (92.9)	6 (3.9)	5 (3.2)
Victim of serious crime should be contacted few days after in order to check if assistance has been sought/ received.	115 (74.2)	22 (14.2)	18 (11.6)
It is necessary to establish protocols for proper treatment of specific types of victims (rape, family violence etc.)	149 (96.1)	2 (1.3)	4 (2.6)
Sex crime victim should be interviewed by police officer of same gender.	100 (64.5)	9 (5.8)	46 (29.7)
Victims of violent crime can develop PTSD.	134 (86.5)	15 (9.7)	6 (3.9)
Police contact with victims influences their confidence in the whole criminal justice system.	144 (92.9)	7 (4.5)	4 (2.6)
Special techniques are needed in interviewing victims of serious crimes (attempted murder, robbery, rape).	152 (98.1)	0	3 (1.9)
In order to obtain all relevant information, it's necessary to build a rapport with a victim.	150 (97.4)	2 (1.3)	2 (1.3)
It's important to empathize with victim.	110 (71.0)	28 (18.1)	17 (11.0)
Each victim requires special approach.	94 (60.6)	22 (14.2)	39 (25.2)
Personal participation in victimisation should be explained to victim.	4 (2.6)	8 (5.2)	142 (92.2)
When evidence is not sufficient, victim should be advised not to file charges.	12 (7.7)	12 (7.7)	131 (84.5)
When damage is small or insignificant, victim should be advised not to file charges.	16 (10.3)	9 (5.8)	130 (83.9)
Victims should be informed that their experience isn't so terrible.	14 (9.0)	21 (13.5)	120 (77.4)
Offender should (if possible) compensate the damage for victim.	143 (92.3)	8 (5.2)	4 (2.6)
State should establish a fund for financial compensation for victims of serious crimes.	122 (78.7)	20 (12.9)	13 (8.4)
In order to testify in court, all possible assistance should be promised to victim.	98 (63.2)	19 (12.3)	38 (24.5)
Police should give more pieces of preventive information to citizens.	147 (94.8)	6 (3.9)	2 (1.3)



Victims of serious crimes should be occasionally contacted (telephone call or in person) to check how they are doing.	102 (65.8)	30 (19.4)	23 (14.8)
During the interview, victim should have an opportunity to tell everything she or he thinks and feels.	148 (95.5)	5 (3.2)	2 (1.3)
Victim should be informed (in writing) about progress in police investigation.	20 (13.0)	35 (22.7)	99 (64.3)
Victim should be informed (verbally) about progress in police investigation.	104 (67.5)	18 (11.7)	32 (20.8)
Victim should be informed (by phone) about progress in police investigation.	50 (32.5)	34 (22.1)	70 (45.5)

Data on participants' current treatment of victim and self-evaluation of competence (Table 4) show that majority of participants do inform victims about their rights, a smaller percentage inform victims about police procedure and an even smaller percentage inform victims about court procedure. Although some police officers might think that victim doesn't have to be informed about police or court procedure, it would be important to oblige police officers to give such information to victim at the beginning of the criminal justice process. Victim as a regular citizen is not (in most cases) familiar with criminal justice – its language, procedures, legal and other remedies. Lack of knowledge can create additional fear and distort expectations which can result (beside secondary victimisation) in victim's disappointment with the whole system.

About ¾ of participants refer victims to other government agencies or NGOs for help. Less than half of the participants state that they have a list of such organisations or NGO brochures they can give to victims. Participants expect to get such lists or brochures, they don't think that creating or obtaining such lists or brochures is a part of their job (oral communication).

Participants rate their education and competencies for working with (or helping) victims poorly. The information gives valuable feedback regarding police education system in Croatia.

More than half of participants (or someone close to them) was crime victims (more than in the UNDP survey sample – 19 %) and 27.3 % of those who reported victimisation experienced violent victimisation.

At the end of the questionnaire, participants were given an opportunity to share their thoughts on this subject. Many of them emphasized insufficient training and education on practical aspects of working with victims, lack of protocols or check lists for conducting an interview etc.

	n	(valid) %
Do you inform victims about their rights?		
Yes	131	91.0
No	13	9.0

**Table 4:**  
Current practice in treating victims and self-evaluation of competence

## Specific Roles and Responsibilities of the Police in Victim Assistance: Police Officers' View

Do you inform victims about police procedures?		
Yes	110	76.4
No	34	23.6
Do you inform victims about court procedures?		
Yes	91	63.6
No	52	36.4
Do you refer victims to GOs and NGOs for help?		
Yes	110	76.9
No	33	23.1
Is there a list of such organisations in your agency?		
Yes	66	46.2
No	77	49.7
Do you have NGO brochures that you can give to victims?		
Yes	54	37.5
No	90	62.5
Do you think that you could improve your communication with crime victims?		
Yes	134	93.7
No	9	6.3
Have you ever attended any course or seminar on interviewing crime victims?		
Yes	32	21.3
No	118	78.7
Have you ever attended any course or seminar on helping crime victims?		
Yes	16	10.5
No	136	87.7
Have you obtained information about helping victims in other ways?*		
Through media	75	49.0
Reading professional literature	83	53.9
Conversation with experienced colleagues	75	48.7
Do you think that you have enough knowledge about crime victims' rights?		
Yes	38	24.8
No	115	75.2
Do you think that you have enough knowledge about possible ways to help crime victims?		
Yes	32	20.8
No	122	79.2
Are you well-informed about organisations that victims could contact for psychological or other kind of help?		
Yes	37	24.0
No	117	76.0
Have you (or someone close to you) ever been a crime victim?		
No	72	49.0
Yes	75	51.0
Was it a violent crime?		
Yes	50	66.7
No	25	33.3

Note\*: multiple responses

## 5.2 Discriminant Analysis

A discriminant analysis was conducted in order to assess possible differences between participants regarding their attitudes towards victim rights and help (31 items) based on their gender and victimisation experience. No significant difference was found (for gender  $p=0.517$ , for victimisation experience  $p=0.571$ ) so it could be said that participants from this sample do not differ in their attitudes regarding gender or victimisation experience.

## 5.3 Chi-square Test

Chi-square test was used for testing differences in participants' attitudes towards victim rights and help regarding years of their professional experience.

Table 5 provides a percentage distribution for 31 attitudes towards victims in general and police treatment. General impression is that police officers with the longest professional experience express the smallest number of neutral opinions, which might be conjoint result of duration of their professional experience and their age.

Of 31 attitudes, significant differences exist in three. Police officers with the longest professional experience express more disagreement with the idea that victims should be verbally referred to other agencies that can offer legal, medical or psychological help ( $p < 0.03$ ).

Police officers with the longest professional experience express stronger agreement with variable "When evidence is not sufficient, victim should be advised not to file charges" ( $p < 0.01$ ). Long professional experience could be an explanation for this result. It could be summarized by the following thought - if evidence is not sufficient (and the expected result for victim is negative), there is no need to expose the victim to the whole criminal justice proceedings. This result may have protective roots.

Significant difference emerged in the variable "Victim of serious crime should be occasionally contacted (telephone call or in person) to check how he/she is" - agreement level with this variable rises with years of professional experience - more professional experience is linked with greater agreement. This result could be viewed as a result of the greater professional and overall life experience in terms of broader understanding of stressful and/or trauma event consequences.

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**Table 5:**  
Attitudes about victims and the treatment of victims by the police according to years of professional experience

Variable	Item responses %				
	Value	1-5	6-10	11-20	20>
Victims shouldn't be trusted completely.	Agree	48.6	44.4	43.2	53.3
	Neutral	5.4	7.4	5.4	13.3
	Disagree	45.9	48.1	51.4	33.3
Victims are often culpable for what happened.	Agree	2.7	3.7	13.7	7.1
	Neutral	5.4	11.1	2.7	0.0
	Disagree	91.9	85.2	83.6	92.9
Victim should have the right to compensation.	Agree	91.9	88.9	97.3	100.0
	Neutral	5.4	3.7	1.4	0.0
	Disagree	2.7	7.4	1.4	0.0
Victim should have an opportunity to give a victim impact statement at court.	Agree	100.0	100.0	94.6	100.0
	Neutral	0.0	0.0	5.4	0.0
	Disagree	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Police procedure should be explained to victim.	Agree	86.5	96.3	94.6	93.3
	Neutral	5.4	0.0	2.7	0.0
	Disagree	8.1	3.7	2.7	6.7
Victim should be informed about how to protect evidence.	Agree	97.3	92.6	86.5	93.3
	Neutral	2.7	3.7	9.5	6.7
	Disagree	0.0	3.7	4.1	0.0
Victim should be escorted to medical service if needed.	Agree	100.0	96.3	98.6	100.0
	Neutral	0.0	3.7	1.4	0.0
	Disagree	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Victim should be referred (in writing) to other agencies that can offer legal, medical or psychological help.	Agree	56.8	59.3	64.9	53.3
	Neutral	10.8	14.8	18.9	0.0
	Disagree	32.4	25.9	16.2	46.7
Victim should be referred (verbally) to other agencies that can offer legal, medical or psychological help.*	Agree	97.3	92.6	93.2	80.0
	Neutral	2.7	7.4	4.1	0.0
	Disagree	0.0	0.0	2.7	20.0
Victim of serious crime should be contacted few days after in order to check if assistance has been sought/received.	Agree	64.9	63.0	78.4	93.3
	Neutral	16.2	25.9	12.2	0.0
	Disagree	18.9	11.1	9.5	6.7
It is necessary to establish protocols for proper treatment of specific types of victims (rape, family violence etc.).	Agree	94.6	92.6	97.3	100.0
	Neutral	2.7	0.0	1.4	0.0
	Disagree	2.7	7.4	1.4	0.0
Sex crime victim should be interviewed by police officer of same gender.	Agree	62.2	51.9	73.0	53.3
	Neutral	8.1	11.1	1.4	6.7
	Disagree	29.7	37.0	25.7	40.0
Victims of violent crimes can develop PTSD.	Agree	78.4	88.9	90.5	86.7
	Neutral	16.2	11.1	6.8	0.0
	Disagree	5.4	0.0	2.7	13.3
Police contact with victims influences their confidence in the whole criminal justice system.	Agree	89.2	92.6	94.6	93.3
	Neutral	8.1	3.7	2.7	6.7
	Disagree	2.7	3.7	2.7	0.0

Special techniques are needed in interviewing victims of serious crime (attempted murder, robbery, rape).	Agree	97.3	100.0	98.6	93.3
	Neutral	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Disagree	2.7	0.0	1.4	6.7
In order to obtain all relevant information, it's necessary to build a rapport with a victim.	Agree	94.4	92.6	100.0	100.0
	Neutral	2.8	3.7	0.0	0.0
	Disagree	2.8	3.7	0.0	0.0
It's important to empathize with victim.	Agree	73.0	77.8	64.9	86.7
	Neutral	16.2	14.8	20.3	13.3
	Disagree	10.8	7.4	14.9	0.0
Each victim requires a special approach.	Agree	56.8	59.3	64.9	53.3
	Neutral	10.8	14.8	18.9	0.0
	Disagree	32.4	25.9	16.2	46.7
Personal participation in victimisation should be explained to victim.	Agree	5.4	7.4	0.0	0.0
	Neutral	5.4	11.1	4.1	0.0
	Disagree	89.2	81.5	95.9	100.0
When evidence is not sufficient, victim should be advised not to file charges. **	Agree	2.7	18.5	2.7	26.7
	Neutral	16.2	0.0	8.1	0.0
	Disagree	81.1	81.5	89.2	73.3
When damage is small or insignificant, victim should be advised not to file charges.	Agree	13.5	22.2	2.7	20.0
	Neutral	8.1	3.7	6.8	0.0
	Disagree	78.4	74.1	90.5	80.0
Victims should be informed that their experience isn't so terrible.	Agree	5.4	14.8	10.8	0.0
	Neutral	21.6	18.5	8.1	0.0
	Disagree	73.0	66.7	81.1	100.0
Offender should (if possible) compensate the damage to victim.	Agree	89.2	96.3	91.9	93.3
	Neutral	8.1	3.7	4.1	6.7
	Disagree	2.7	0.0	4.1	0.0
State should establish a fund for the financial compensation for victims of serious crimes.	Agree	73.0	81.5	75.7	100.0
	Neutral	16.2	11.1	14.9	0.0
	Disagree	10.8	7.4	9.5	0.0
In order to testify in court, all possible assistance should be promised to victim.	Agree	64.9	77.8	58.1	60.0
	Neutral	5.4	7.4	18.9	6.7
	Disagree	29.7	14.8	23.0	33.3
Police should give more preventive information to citizens.	Agree	89.2	88.9	98.6	100.0
	Neutral	8.1	7.4	1.4	0.0
	Disagree	2.7	3.7	0.0	0.0
Victims of serious crimes should be occasionally contacted (telephone call or in person) to check how they are doing. ***	Agree	51.4	59.3	68.9	93.3
	Neutral	35.1	22.2	14.9	0.0
	Disagree	13.5	18.5	16.2	6.7
During an interview, victim should have an opportunity to tell everything she or he thinks and feels.	Agree	97.3	85.2	97.3	100.0
	Neutral	2.7	7.4	2.7	0.0
	Disagree	0.0	7.4	0.0	0.0
Victim should be informed (in writing) about the progress in police investigation.	Agree	8.1	7.4	19.2	6.7
	Neutral	16.2	25.9	27.4	13.3
	Disagree	75.7	66.7	53.4	80.0

## Specific Roles and Responsibilities of the Police in Victim Assistance: Police Officers' View

Victim should be informed (verbally) about the progress in police investigation.	Agree	54.1	63.0	74.0	73.3
	Neutral	13.5	14.6	8.2	20.0
	Disagree	32.4	22.2	17.8	6.7
Victim should be informed (by phone) about the progress in police investigation	Agree	24.3	22.2	37.0	40.0
	Neutral	27.0	25.9	20.5	13.3
	Disagree	48.6	51.9	42.5	46.7

Notes: \*  $p < 0.03$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.05$

### 5.4 Research Limitation and Implications

This research has a few limitations: the convenient sample was used (which limits the generalisation of the results), some questions weren't completely clear to participants (they were ambiguous or the respondents gave answers according to the current situation), then there is a question of giving socially acceptable answers (because they were polled at the beginning of the course entitled Applied Victimology).

Results and discussions with participants clearly indicate the need for revising victim-related topics at all levels of police training and education and the need for establishing policies and protocols for dealing with victims.

## 6 CONCLUSION

A short evaluation of police officers' responsibility regarding victims in the Republic of Croatia, taking into consideration the temporal perspective of two decades of democratic changes, would be: even though significant progress can be noticed, it is still far from the ideal, expressed by the credo to serve and protect.

The main thesis of the paper was that similar to the practice of evaluating democratization level and humanity of a society based on its practice of respect for each person, the evaluation of professionalism, democratization and humanity of the police finds it sufficient to look into the attitude towards the victim. It should not be forgotten that the idea of responsibility of the police towards the victim has been developed slowly even in societies with democratic practice, because achieved democratic standards in human and civil rights protection do not change the social reality in which Machiavellian principle of authority and traditional patriarchal domination still present firm social foundations. It can in the end be concluded that the data interpreted in this paper confirm and illustrate the existence of all the discussed inhibiting factors, which helps explain why the awareness of responsibility towards the victim in the police gets to be raised very slowly. The mentioned and described inhibiting factors, traditional patterns, stereotypes and prejudice still present a substantial part of everyday police practice, and they are slowing down the realization of the vision of police serving and protecting the citizens who through taxes pay for and consequently expect high professionalism, but also moral rectitude and raised awareness of police officers about human and civil rights.



The final diagnosis about significant progress but distance from the ideal refers less to general awareness of police officers regarding the victim and more to the implementation and enforcement of good laws and regulations taken over from stable and well-organized democracies. It will most certainly be very interesting to dedicate future research attempts to measuring the extent to which the content of certain courses<sup>2</sup> comprising current police education in the Republic of Croatia (Police Ethics, Human Rights, Society and the Police, Applied Victimology, Communication Skills, Interview Techniques, Legal Protection of Child and Minor) got to be internalised and the extent to which they have consequently contributed to the police officers' highest democratic action principles. These principles should be manifested as a high degree of compliance with the following attitudes, as defined by the authors of this paper:

*Every citizen deserves to be treated with civility, politeness, respect, and high professionalism, but a victim must also feel compassion and readiness for immediate help.*

*Everybody needs safety and help, but the duty of the police is to take care of safety of all within normative framework, while a special task of a police officer is to show sensitivity and feeling for all that happens to the victim.*

*Depending on the moment and the context, anyone can become a helpless victim, even the strongest, smartest, wealthiest ones. Anyone can happen to become a victim of violence, theft, traffic accident or less dramatic but undesirable situations (getting lost in an unknown city).*

*The relationship between a police officer and a victim needs to follow certain special rules, not different but more specific than the rules operationalized from the principle to serve and protect.*

*The attitude of police officers towards a person who has had a negative experience should not and cannot deepen the experienced discomfort.*

*Cold and bureaucratic approach, howsoever 'by the book' or by command of superiors, presents additional violence, worsens the experienced trauma, and is ineffective and ill starred professionally speaking.*

*Violence victims are not only direct victims but also all who sympathize with the pain or are in any way closely emotionally connected with the victim.*

*Approaching the victim must be deeply humane and filled with understanding, professional of course, but with a clear message that our professional demands are exclusively connected with the desire to help and achieve justice.*

*Persons with the experience of violence on the basis of any visible or assumed difference deserve special understanding and sensitivity.*

*Victims of violence on the basis of racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, worldview or political affiliation are not only victims of a particular violent act but have likely already experienced discomfort or have been subject to constant discrimination on the same basis.*

The purpose of this paper was to emphasize the police role in improving a victim's position in the society. However, it is important to keep in mind that the victim and her or his recovery is the responsibility of the whole society, especially of the democratic state and its institutions. Thus, coordinated and harmonized

2 For the academic year 2005/2006 the whole Croatian higher education system was harmonised with "Bologna process" which resulted in new curriculum for Police College programs.

improvement (at state, regional and local level, at intergovernmental level and civil society level) of the victim support is needed.

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