

## SECONDARY VICTIMS: THE UNHEEDED SUFFERERS

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### INTRODUCTION

The penal philosophy in India is more criminal centric rather than victim centric. The status of victims is merely that of a witness because the State undertakes the responsibility to prosecute and punish the culprits. A victim is a person who has suffered any loss or injury caused by reason of the act or omission for which the accused person has been charged and the expression "victim" includes his or her guardian or legal heir.<sup>1</sup>

When a crime is committed it doesn't only affect the primary victim but its consequences affects the victim's family, friends, colleagues, community and society at large. This effect is referred to as vicarious or secondary victimization.<sup>2</sup> Secondary victims can be defined as persons who, though not the primary victim of the crime, have suffered some form of vicarious trauma as a result.<sup>3</sup>

With the advancement in the study of criminal behavior, it was in 1964 when Sellin and Wolfgang came up with their typology of victims, considerable attention was pulled towards secondary victims for the first time. They explain that primary victims are person or group who are the first hand sufferers of crime while secondary victims are those who are so closely related with primary victims that the suffering of primary victims causes them the pain of crime.<sup>4</sup> In other words secondary victims are the passive and unwilling witness of injury caused to others.<sup>5</sup> Although the family and friends plays a central role in supporting the primary victim but still very little research has been done to examine the impact of crime on the victim's family, friends and community. Failing to recognize the impact an act of violence may have on these secondary victims limits our understanding of

<sup>1</sup> Section 2(wa) , The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973

<sup>2</sup> Christiansen D, Bak R and Elklit A (2012). Secondary Victims of Rape. *Violence and Victims* 27(2):246-262.

<sup>3</sup> Fuller G (2015). *The Database of Victimization Experiences*. Australian Institute of Criminology Technical and Background Paper no 60 Canberra:AIC

<sup>4</sup> Meadows, R.J. (2007) *Understanding Violence and Victimization*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Upper Saddle, N.J. Pearson Prentice Hall; Tabettha Cooper (2013) *Victim Typologies*. "Secondary victimization is when a person gets victimized inadvertently as a result of a crime", [www.criminologyjust.blogspot.in](http://www.criminologyjust.blogspot.in); dated 10.3.2018

<sup>5</sup> Lord Oliver, *Alcock v. Chief Constable of South Yorkshire Police*. [1991] UKHL 5, [ 1992] 1AC 310.

the efficacy of informal support offered to victims more generally. The ability to be supportive and avoid negative responses may be hampered if helpers are burdened by their own emotions.<sup>6</sup> One of the goals of any after-care program is to ensure a victim has adequate support.

There are close ties of love and affection between primary and secondary victims. Witnessing the injury, death of or extreme danger or discomfort to the primary victim causes in secondary victims, a psychiatric injury which arise from sudden and unexpected shock. The devastating emotional impact of a crime on the families, friends and close associates of the primary victims is not well understood, and secondary victims receive little specialist support.

The victims of crime specially the violent ones require considerable support post-incident. The parents and other close family members are in the position that they find themselves the main source of support while also dealing with their own feelings about the crime. Family members are confronted by, and have to deal with their own reactions to the crime such as anger, self-blame, overwhelmingness etc.<sup>7</sup> They may also have to face a change in their relationship with other family members which usually is highly interconnected.

The role of family support in victim outcomes has been extensively explored. In a retrospective study of 348 French-Canadian adult survivors of child sexual abuse it was found a perception of parental support had a positive long-term outcomes, specifically, better relationship and psychological functioning and adjustment in adulthood.<sup>8</sup> In another research which was focused on the importance of maternal support, it was found that mothers provide a positive source of emotional support and play an important role in creating beneficial therapeutic outcomes.<sup>9</sup> But very little research has examined the issue of the victimization of family and close friends of primary victims. The crime committed on

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<sup>6</sup> Aherns C and Campbell R (2000). Assisting rape victims as they recover from rape: The impact on friends. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 15: 959-986.

<sup>7</sup> Foster J (2014) Supporting child victims of sexual abuse: Implementation of a trauma narrative family intervention. *The Family Journal: Counselling and Therapy for Couples and Families* 22(3): 332-338

<sup>8</sup> Godbout N, Briere J, Sabourin S and Lussier Y 2014. Child sexual abuse and subsequent relationship and personal functioning: The role of parental support. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 38: 317-325.

<sup>9</sup> Corcoran J, (2004) Treatment outcome research with the non-offending parents of sexually abused children: A critical review. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 13(2): 59-84; Cyr M, Wright J, Toupin J, Oxman-Martinez J, McDuff P and Theriault C (2002). Predictors of maternal support; The point of view of adolescent victims of sexual abuse and their mother. *Journal of Child Sexual Assault* 12(1): 39-65

children, family member has a substantial effect on other family members, which in turn may affect how they support the primary victim.

The role of a family's 'shared reality' is needed to be understood. Family members feel bonded, even when not physically together, due to the close way in which they live their lives and share their reality.<sup>10</sup> Whenever a disclosure of crime is shared with family, this 'shared family reality' is suddenly and drastically readjusted, resulting in crisis. It is necessary to understand and respond to post-crime crisis in a familial context. Assisting family members to cope with the disclosures and respond in a supportive and effective way can lead to better outcomes for the primary victim.<sup>11</sup> For the purpose of study the information provided by Database of Victimization Experiences is used.<sup>12</sup> In the database a sample of 730 psychological evaluations of victims of violent crimes who sought compensation from victims services between 2005 and 2010 were used to study the psychological condition of secondary victims.<sup>13</sup>

On the basis of a survey, the responses of secondary victims can be classified into two heads namely short term responses and long term responses.

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## SHORT TERM RESPONSES

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Distress is the most common feeling the secondary victims reported to experience when they came to know about the abuse. However, 31 percent of them feel it in intense way. These people also accept that the distress made the situation much harder to deal with. Another common feeling is intense anger at the time of discovery of abuse. However, it was mostly the male relatives who experience anger more intensely than female relatives. Other than distress and anger it's the feeling of shock and numbness which overwhelmed

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<sup>10</sup> Oz S (2005). The "Wall of Fear": The bridge between the traumatic event and trauma resolution therapy for childhood sexual abuse survivors. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 14(3): 23-47

<sup>11</sup> Hill A (2012). Help for children after child sexual abuse: Using a qualitative approach to design and test therapeutic interventions that may include non-offending parents. *Qualitative Social Work* 11(4): 362-378

<sup>12</sup> In the year 2013, The Australian Institute of Criminology and Victim Services NSW agreed to develop a database on victimization experiences, using de-identified information collected as part of compensation claims lodged with the Victim Services NSW. As a result a database of Victimization Experiences (DoVE) was developed. The primary aim behind the making of this database is to develop a database which contains qualitative and quantitative information about the victim/survivor's functioning prior to and after a crime and thereby allowing researchers to fully explore the nature and impact of violent victimisation by analyzing psychological evaluations of victims.

<sup>13</sup> Fuller G. 2015. The Database of Victimization Experiences. Australian Institute of Criminology.

people. Some secondary victims reported that when they come to know about the crime they experience utter confusion and had only sporadic memories of the time.

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### **LONG TERM RESPONSES:**

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With time, these short term reactions turn to deepen and more entrenched. Some secondary victims remained fixated on killing or hurting the offenders and find vengeance as sole means of attaining peace. Others expressed their anger at the perceived failure of the criminal justice system to protect their relatives. In others the distress developed into anxiety and depression. In some victims it provokes suicidal ideation while in others it causes lack of normal functioning. The most common feeling in long term response is the sense of guilt, a failure to realize that the abuse was occurring and hence stopping it. This guilt further matures into sense of hopelessness and diminishing the sense of self-worth. The act of self-victimization became very crucial.

Many secondary victims experience post-traumatic stress disorder. Intrusive thoughts were experienced by them. One mother reported experiencing distressing images of the abuse throughout the day and night and nightmares three to four times per week. These nightmares were exacerbated when her daughter began to self-harm. Secondary victims also have to deal with victim precipitation. It is a concept that a victim could be a contributing factor to his or her successive victimization. While victim precipitation was seen by many scholars as an important means of understanding both victim-offender relationships and situational factors, critics believed that it unfairly blamed victims for the offences committed against them and further causes mental agony to secondary victims. Secondary victims have to attend not only to their own personal adjustment but also to the vicissitudes of the primary victim healing and the impact of those fluctuations on their relationship. Many effective secondary victims are keenly aware of the impact of the trauma on both the primary survivor and on the relationship.

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### **TREATMENT**

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Out of the 18 secondary victims who received therapy, 13 reported taking counseling and 11 found it beneficial. The victims realized how counseling allow them to challenge their thinking, make them feel they are not alone and normalize their response. When family is included in therapy and it includes narration of trauma, it allows secondary victims to understand the nature of the abuse and to express their feelings. Such situation provides an

open and supportive environment and bring the primary and secondary victims more closer.<sup>14</sup>

One of the main issue is how to achieve healing of victims simultaneously. Familiarity with a number of perspectives on interconnected processes would be useful. From the perspective of the primary victim, the conceptualizations of the healing processes do a disservice to the relationship importance. The relational considerations- the interplay, the give and take, the balance are necessary not only for the resources to be available for healing of the primary victims but also for the adjustment of all those impacted. Primacy must be given to healing of primary victim. It is the primary victim who is the focal point of the healing process, if the overall healing is to be achieved. Without giving primacy to the healing of the primary victim, relationship healing will not occur or at best will be difficult to achieve. By primacy we do not mean healing of primary victims should be achieved entirely before healing of secondary victims could begin because by that time the relationship would definitely suffer or even break. Therapeutic intervention is necessary to support the healing of the primary victim while at the same time supporting that of the secondary victim to find a balance between the requirements of the primary victim healing and the requirements of the secondary victims. Thus, therapeutic intervention is needed to negotiate the interdependence of the healing. Secondary victims need help in grasping the impact of the trauma on both the lives of primary victims and their own. Secondary victims healing will rely heavily on understanding the chaotic nature of remembering traumatic events and adjusting to them. Employing “scene setting” with secondary victims can give them a sense of experiencing what fragmentary recall and situation specific memory are like, aiding in understanding the process.

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## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

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The secondary victims experience a wide range of negative emotions. These feelings include shock, anger, guilt and as a result they become either overprotective or isolated from family and society again adversely affecting primary victims. The struggles faced by the secondary victims need a multifaceted approach in effectively dealing with the issue. Along with providing simultaneous support, care and removing post victimization, family therapies will be helpful. Those therapies which use trauma narration help victims to

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<sup>14</sup> Feather JS and Ronan KR 2009. Trauma focused CBT with maltreated children: A clinic-base evaluation of a new treatment manual. *Australian Psychologist* 44: 174-194 ; Hill A 2012. Help for children after child sexual abuse: Using a qualitative approach to design and test therapeutic interventions that may include non-offending parents. *Qualitative Social Work* 11(4): 362-378 ; Silverman W, Ortiz C, Viswesvaran C, Burns B, Kolko D, Putman F and Amaya-Jackson L 2008. Evidence based psychosocial treatments for children and adolescents exposed to traumatic events. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology* 37: 156-183.

express themselves and feel validated.<sup>15</sup> Another approach which combines trauma narration with element of cognitive behavioural therapy and includes the use of relaxation skills, cognitive coping skills and conjoint primary-secondary sessions offer support to primary and secondary victims. In other words it can be said that holistic family approaches help in the recovery of primary and secondary victims both.<sup>16</sup> A relationship is not a relationship unless it is maintained by both those involved. While the secondary survivor healing process has been portrayed as reliant on and reactive to the healing process of the primary survivor, little has been said specifically about the ongoing role relationship dynamics in the overall healing (self-organization) process of the social support network involved. The literature around the needs of secondary victims of crime is generally limited and further study on the type of support services they engage with is warranted. Research is needed to understand better the relationship between the primary victims and secondary victims. This research provides some light on the nature of the relationship. It is necessary that the effects of crime on secondary victims should not be overlooked.

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<sup>15</sup> Tjersland OA, Mossige S, Gulbrandsen W, Jensen TK and Reichelt S 2006. Helping families when CSA is suspected but not proven. *Child and Family Social Work* 11: 297-306.

<sup>16</sup> Tjersland OA, Mossige S, Gulbrandsen W, Jensen TK and Reichelt S 2006. Helping families when CSA is suspected but not proven. *Child and Family Social Work* 11: 297-306.