THE STATION STUDY REPORT

Victoria Police and victims of crime: police perspectives and experiences from across Victoria
Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Victoria Police members who participated in this research. Station inspectors and Victoria Police personnel across the state were welcoming, supportive of the research process and generous in their provision of time and space for the interviews.

We extend our gratitude also to the Victims Advisory Unit, in particular Priscilla Mulhern and Yasmin Green, for their coordination and liaison with stations across Victoria to enable the interview process.

The research has also benefited from the work and support of its Steering Committee.

The project was funded by the Australian Research Council and Victoria Police (Linkage Project LP0454956) administered through Monash University.

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This project adhered to the reporting processes of the Australian Research Council that govern the administration of Linkage Projects, and the ethical standards governing research required by the Monash University Standing Committee on Ethics and Research with Human Subjects and Victoria Police Human Research Ethics Committee. The project also reported to the Corporate Committee of Victoria Police that oversees research partnerships.
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Executive summary

Every day, across Victoria, there are thousands of interactions between police and victims of crime. These interactions vary widely according to the nature and location of the offence, the characteristics of the victim, and the demeanour of the officer involved. This study draws on semi-structured interviews conducted over 2009–10 with approximately 200 operational Victoria Police members from 19 stations across the state. The interviews focused on police perceptions and experiences in relation to interaction with victims of crime, external support agencies and the implementation of Victoria Police policy and protocol relating to victim support and notification.

The findings gathered from these interviews offer insights into how police understand and view their role generally and in relation to victims; the breadth and diversity of police–victim interactions; the ways in which police respond to and manage victim-related protocols and processes within the context of investigative and other duties; and the ways in which police engage with external agencies in the provision of support to victims. The analysis and recommendations presented in this report are built around these findings. The findings presented below are a summary of the major findings of the study which provide the impetus for the recommendations that follow. More detailed analysis is provided in the subsequent analysis sections.

First, however, we relate the details of these findings, and the recommendations arising from them, to the broad overall finding on the connection between policing and victim support.

Police and victims: the dominance of the crime-fighting model

The interviews revealed diversity in police attitudes towards and interactions with victims of crime. While overall police identified victims and victim support as an aspect of their work, the majority of participants emphasised that victims assume a secondary priority. For uniform general duties officers who comprised the overwhelming majority of participants in this research, the crime-fighting and investigative focus of their work was the foremost priority within their daily work. This does not mean that the police interviewed undermined or dismissed victims and victim support, although many did. Rather, officers more commonly viewed assisting victims as a social service that is generally beyond the remit of their work and subsequently Victoria Police victim notification processes were approached as an administrative function rather than as a service function of policing. Critically, as we detail in Section 6, exceptions to this were identified in cases where individual officers felt compelled by personal or contextual factors to offer extensive support and assistance to victims, but these exceptions represent the minority of victim interactions with Victoria Police.

One important finding of this research is that police on the ground generally operate within a crime-fighting paradigm. However, the exceptions to this approach that are detailed in this report enable possibilities for reform to be identified. The evidence demonstrates that the pervasive culture that gives victims a secondary place cannot be changed through policy and rhetoric alone. Indeed, while many police recognised the importance of attending to victims’ needs and maintaining positive communication with victims, reflecting awareness of the changes within Victoria Police that have occurred under the Victorian Victims’ Charter Act 2006 (hereinafter Victims’ Charter Act), this does not substantially alter policing practice. Enabling police to prioritise victims in more meaningful ways while still undertaking their crime-fighting duties requires micro- and macro-level reform that is cognisant of both the local and broader context within which policing is undertaken in Victoria.
The researchers see these findings as providing some valuable insights to Victoria Police and enabling a genuine opportunity to institute reform and change that begins at the level of general duties and uniform officers based around the state.

**The police role**

Section 5 focuses on the interview findings that arose from discussions regarding police perceptions of the police role, both generally and in relation to victims of crime specifically, as well as their experiences and perceptions of the victim-specific policy frameworks and protocols operating at Victoria Police.

Findings in general:

- **Broadly defined:** An individual officer’s definitions of the police role and remit are intrinsically connected to their identification of the role of police in relation to victim support.

- **Influenced by location:** Police attitudes are mediated by geographic and organisational location.

General attitudes and responses to policing developments:

- **Victim notification processes equate to more work and increased managerialism rather than enabling better or more efficient police work:** The purpose of innovations and organisational change are often inadequately transmitted to front-line staff. New policies and procedures (inclusive of those directly related to Victim Notification) are resented by a significant minority of police for reasons including that they have created: new avenues for discipline and reprimand of staff by management; new channels for complaints from the public; and increased workloads.

- **Limits of electronic recording systems:** These are often viewed as serving a monitoring role for the wrongful behaviour/inaction of officers, rather than creating opportunities for acknowledging and rewarding good policing. They are also viewed as having little to no impact on the quality of service provided to victims.

- **Mixed levels of compliance with victim notification process on the Law Enforcement Assistance Program (LEAP):** Noncompliance generally occurs at the patrol stage with the L1 Form, but it is virtually impossible to measure the extent of this. The majority of reasons put forward to explain this pointed to concern that the system increases workload and does not deliver anything more to victims of crime and the opinion that the interface is clumsy and difficult to operate. According to participants, noncompliance did not translate into not keeping victims notified, but this is difficult to measure.

Factors that impact on victim service provision:

- **General duties attitudes and focus:** In general, officers are focused on their primary investigative mandate such that victim-focused efforts are always secondary.

- **Location and connection:** In general, officers who feel connected to the communities they serve tend to place a higher priority on victims of crime.

- **Resources:** Police frequently cite time and resource constraints as the major factors prohibiting more effective interactions with victims of crime.

- **Shiftwork:** The rotation of shiftwork causes significant issues in maintaining continuity of contact with victims of crime.

- **Court results and finalisation of cases:** While emphasis is on individual officers updating victims, information regarding bail hearings, court dates and outcomes are often not registered on the
system in a timely or efficient way, meaning that officers must manually search for information that should be easily accessible electronically.

- **On-the-job training:** It is seen that the positive gains of training at the Academy may quickly unravel if mentors consider victims of crime to be a low priority and instead encourage a ‘crime-fighting’ orientation.

- **Front-line supervision:** This has an important role to play in cultivating awareness of policies and procedures and in contextualising this within broader policing goals.

### Working with victims: police perceptions and experiences

Section 6 focuses on the findings arising from the discussions about police experiences in working directly with victims of crime. We asked participants to define victims of crime, to identify any ways in which they may differentiate what victims of crime want and need, and to discuss their perceptions of victim expectations of police. We also asked police to reflect on the ways in which they manage both the organisational as and victim expectations of police–victim interactions, and the strategies and mechanisms they have developed to manage these expectations.

### General findings

- **‘Ideal’ victims and ‘non-ideal’ victims:** Police consistently categorised victims according to the extent to which they are perceived as vulnerable, blameless and respectable (i.e. ‘ideal’) victims, or deserving (i.e. they are to blame for the crime they experience) ‘non-ideal’ victims.

- **Categories impact upon additional but not baseline service delivery:** While all victims received the minimum service provision, those deemed in need and more deserving of additional time and/or support receive additional care and time.

### Variations across communities

- **In areas where residents tend to be of lower socioeconomic status the victim/offender overlap is more frequent,** as is the perception that residents rely more on police to resolve trivial interpersonal altercations.

- **Multicultural communities present many ongoing and new challenges:** Cultural values and dispositions held by multicultural communities towards the police create challenges in the provision of police support to them, ranging from hostility towards the police to making investigations complex and difficult to complete. Officers often felt poorly prepared, particularly in relation to newly established migrant communities.

### Victim needs

- **Needs are not defined by the crime type:** Participants emphasised that the severity of a crime’s impact on a victim is not necessarily related to the crime type, although crimes against the person were viewed as especially serious.

- **Recognition of the importance of style of policing for victim satisfaction:** Participants generally recognised that listening to victims of crime, treating their cases as important and displaying empathy were all valuable, and were behaviours that they sought to implement.
• **Recognition of the importance of timely updates:** Participants widely acknowledged the importance of the provision of information to victims regarding the progress of cases, although in practice this is not carried out universally.

• **Recognition that victims need to understand the process:** Clearly explaining what will happen following the first contact with police was frequently put forward as a critical aspect of defining and managing victims’ expectations of police.

• **Expectations frequently unrealistic:** Police identified that there are a minority of victims of crime who hold unrealistic perceptions of police resources, investigation duration and likely outcomes.

**Innovations in services**

• **Crime Desks play a key role:** Crime Desks are generally perceived to satisfy victim expectations regarding investigation and recognition of the seriousness of the crime.

**Supporting victims: police engagement with external agencies**

The final analysis section, Section 7, presents the findings from our examination of the models of victim support that are in practice across Victoria and the extent to which Victoria Police engages with other service agencies to assist in the provision of support.

**In general**

• **Referral is the dominant model:** Police consistently rely on the provision of Victims of Crime Helpline Information (with a 24-hour contact number) as the tool for supporting victims of crime.

• **Referral to the helpline can be inadequate, and this is recognised by police:** The exercise of discretion is applied to determine those cases in which individuals may need more immediate and/or a different model of support that does not rely on victims having to proactively seek assistance.

• **Individual assistance is provided routinely across Victoria in a small number of cases to fill gaps and meet specific victim needs:** As a consequence of the inadequacies of referral some police will and do assist individuals to make direct contact with specific agencies for reasons that range from the geographic isolation of the victim, to sympathy and concern for the victim, to police members’ awareness of specific agencies that may be able to assist.

• **Location is a significant factor in police–external agency engagement:** Generally, in smaller communities there is a greater opportunity for networks to be established between police and other agencies; however, this was often a reflection of the drive and innovation of key individual personnel.

**Awareness of and engagement with external agencies**

• **A key frustration is a lack of service provider information that is up to date, easily accessible and specific to locale:** Police find it difficult to identify local services that provide support to victims of crime, and to keep their knowledge of such up to date.

• **In some locations police often constitute the only service provider able to provide timely assistance to victims, which impacts on the responsiveness and provision of policing services more generally:** In regional areas in particular, police frequently cited frustration about events arising outside of work hours which render them unable to provide immediate or timely services.
to victims. A major concern was raised about the Department of Human Services whose mandated welfare role may be spread across significant geographic areas, thus creating delays in response times and placing additional resource pressures on police.

- Police officers vary in their identification of the need to provide additional support to victims: Across and within stations, individual officers varied in their interest in, and commitment to, playing a direct role in referring victims to specific services.
Recommendations

These recommendations are drawn from across the three analysis sections of this report, the findings of which are summarised above. The recommendations are divided into internal (i.e. specific to Victoria Police) and external (i.e. involving Victoria Police and others external to the organisation).

Internal recommendations

Current practice and protocols

1. **Primary role is referral, but the secondary role of support provision requires recognition**

The research findings indicated that Victoria Police members primarily refer victims of crime to support services via the L1 form and/or the Victims Handbook, but in some circumstances (depending on location, crime type and/or the specific needs of the victim) members provide additional support which ranges from assisting victims, to directly contacting support agencies, to visiting victims of crime in the weeks or months following an incident. The findings indicate that Victoria Police members are providing additional support across Victoria but that this work is largely unacknowledged and unsupported by the agency. Victoria Police has an opportunity to enable and enhance this process without shifting the emphasis away from referral as the primary role of police in the majority of circumstances. Thus, we recommend that the secondary role of direct support provision to victims, which is currently provided by Victoria Police members to varying degrees, should be recognised and supported. However, referral should remain the primary way in which police provide assistance, as this was reported by police participants to be appropriate, achievable and adequate for the majority of victims. This also ensures that Victoria Police continues to meet its mandated requirement, under the Victims’ Charter Act, to deliver information about support services and entitlements to victims of crimes against the person.

2. **LEAP database Victim Notification review and training**

This recommendation has three parts, all pertaining to the Victim Notification component of the LEAP database.

2.1 Victoria Police should review the design and operation of the current Victim Notification Page, which was widely reported to be cumbersome, with a view to a more user-friendly and efficient system.

2.2 The review should involve liaison with the courts to develop an effective means of data exchange between the two organisations that would facilitate automatic and timely flow of information from the courts in relation to specific cases, particularly in relation to case finalisation, to assist police in keeping victims notified about significant developments.

2.3 It is also evident that there are deficits in technical knowledge among police in regards to the Victim Notification Page, and that awareness of and access to existing support publications is limited/inconsistent across the state. While the Victims Advisory Unit has noted that user support is currently accessible via the intranet and the publication of the Users Manual, the Quick Reference Guide and the Frequently Asked Questions Booklet, these sources were rarely identified by participants as something they accessed and/or found useful. We recommend that the current communication of these sources is reviewed and that they be made more accessible. Front-line supervisors should be encouraged to ensure that all officers possess the basic program...
skills necessary to utilise the system. In-house facilitated training programs in the operation of the system should also be made available to individual stations.

New practice and protocols

3. Providing positive feedback to front-line personnel

It is important to create channels for communicating positive feedback in relation to police work with victims of crime, which can be recorded and acknowledged. This should include multiple platforms for feedback to be delivered and a range of ways for feedback to be recorded and acknowledged within both the agency and the community.

The research findings indicated that officers are highly attuned to the potential for negative feedback and dissatisfaction with the police to be submitted by members of the public, and for this feedback to be targeted against individual officers. While it appears that complaints are communicated by the public to the police, there is an opportunity for a feedback webpage and/or hotline to be created through which victims of crime could report their experiences of contact with police. For various reasons, there will always be some victims of crime whose expectations of policing are not met, and who would use such forums as a channel for complaint. Nevertheless, implementation of such a feedback channel would also be likely to encourage positive feedback from victims of crime that could then be acknowledged within the organisation and passed on to individual officers. The research findings suggest that while police are generally not focused on obtaining positive feedback from the community, when it does occur it has an important positive impact on how police feel about their work.

Individual officers should be enabled and encouraged to record the positive feedback in individual officers’ Professional Development Awards (PDAs) that they receive informally, including letters or emails that communicate positive appraisal.

We also recommend that Victoria Police consider the potential for a targeted community campaign, possibly as an awards event (as a one-off or annual event), that would actively encourage the public to participate in acknowledging and recognising positive victim experiences with police. We emphasise the importance of recognising positive police work at the individual level as well as when major events occur that impact entire communities.

4. Referral documentation review and reform: victims information

The practices and processes in place for the provision of victim information require investigation, review and reform. The research found that the extent of provision of the Victims Booklet to individuals was inconsistent across the state for a range of reasons, including the weight and size of the booklets, the generalised nature of the information (i.e. not specific in terms of local services), the impersonal nature of a booklet and the perceived appropriateness of this type of information provision for some situations/individuals. While the Victims Booklets are recommended, it is the L1 form that must be provided to all victims of crime (though we note that the form differs dependent on whether the crime reported is a crime against the person or a property crime). While Victoria Police is only mandated under the Victims’ Charter to provide basic referral information for victims of crimes against the person, there is clearly scope to explore alternative ways to provide information to meet the variations in needs of victims of crimes with whom police interact on a daily basis. We recommend a review of the current information provided on the L1 form itself, in addition to identifying the potential for different platforms (e.g. online, hardcopy) for the provision of information to victims to ensure that timely and targeted support and information are made accessible.
5. **Local directories: Compile and update locally specific directories of service providers to be prominently displayed and available at each station**

This recommendation is drawn from the findings that identified that, in a small but significant number of cases of victimisation with which police must deal, the general helpline number is inadequate. While some police may acknowledge this but do nothing, others look to provide victims with greater support and/or more immediate or local assistance.

We recommend the development of local directories which would require that local services work together to assist police in providing clear, up-to-date information for victims via a central avenue or process. It is clear that officers require a readily available directory of their local support services, in addition to the general Victims of Crime Helpline. This would need to be tailored to specific locations. It is also clear that, due to the fluid nature of the non-government organisation (NGO) sector, someone will be required to take responsibility for regular (e.g. annual) updates of the contact list. The directories should include the name of each service, its hours of operation, a contact number, the name of a contact within the service, and a brief synopsis of the support provided and who the service supports. While Victoria Police can determine the process for implementing such a recommendation, we emphasise that this recommendation is aimed to ensure efficiency in creating such a directory and both awareness of and ease of access to this information. Some stations across Victoria currently provide innovative examples of how this may be possible and stations should be consulted before this initiative were to commence. We note that, Supportlink, a service that provides links to local services tailored to victim needs (with their consent), is currently being trialled in some stations across Victoria. The review of this trial should include consideration of whether this service addresses the requirements of this recommendation.

6. **Shift from a crime-type based model of victim support and referral to a needs-based model**

The findings consistently indicated that victim needs are not entirely a reflection of the crime type experienced; however, as noted above the current model of victim support in Victoria mandates Victoria Police to provide referral information only to those who experience crimes against the person. We recommend that Victoria Police (see also Recommendation 12 below) enables a system of support provision that is responsive to victims’ needs identified by police on the ground when interacting with victims. Police should be supported to provide support, information and assistance more widely and more equally based on victim need, without significantly changing what police members across the state are currently doing. Despite the limited service provision mandate of Victoria Police, police members frequently referred to their frustration with the limited support available to victims of property crime, particularly household burglary, in cases where victims were clearly distressed and/or in need of a range of material, welfare and emotional support services not automatically available to them due to the crime type. Victoria Police has an opportunity to provide a more comprehensive model of victim support, regardless of crime type, that would meet the needs of a small proportion of victims who are likely to request and/or require this. This would place Victoria Police in a position to lead the state in recognising victimisation more broadly and would simultaneously provide support and validation to police members across the state who recognise that service provision should not be based on crime type and who have, to date, provided this additional information and support on a one-to-one basis without assistance or acknowledgement from Victoria Police. We note that for some police this would have the concomitant effect of increasing their job satisfaction, as their frustrations with current levels of victim support would be better managed and addressed.
Review and evaluation


Crime Desks were consistently reported by participants as achieving significant outcomes in relation to victim satisfaction. In many cases police identified these units as providing a critical service over and above the forensic evidence, including the ability for these units to ensure that other police were not tied up at crime scenes; enabling the forensic examination to be more immediate and efficient; and providing a service that victims expect and find satisfying, even if the result is not the recovery of stolen goods. We recommend that the experience of victims be reviewed to gauge the victim impact of these units, in addition to reviewing case resolution statistics. A satisfaction survey could be easily distributed to victims, which would provide an empirical means of testing the validity of the general perception of police that the service provided by the Crime Desk produces high levels of victim satisfaction regardless of the outcome of the case. Such research would also provide a solid evidence base from which Victoria Police could further develop these units and/or increase their number or size across the state.

8. Police victimisation and staff welfare: review of police welfare mechanisms

While the subject was not a major focus of this project, the research revealed that police experience victimisation in a range of forms within their roles as both police and community members. Police who reported experiencing work-related trauma consistently identified that the current email notification system and the provision of internal counselling services were not viewed as effective, and in some cases were experienced in a negative way (most often as impersonal). This system needs to be reviewed. We recommend the development of a suite of responses to provide support to police, to reflect our finding that as per the general community, police respond in a myriad of ways to circumstances they experience in the workplace, and therefore diverse options are required with regard to the provision of recognition and support.

It was also noted that front-line supervisors are integral in intervening where officers experience difficulties due to emotional, work-related stress. The extent to which front-line supervisors provide timely and/or effective support to general duties officers was viewed as inconsistent across stations. We recommend that Victoria Police review any existing training for front-line supervisors regarding the recognition of and response to symptoms of trauma among their staff.

Training

9. Supplementing online training

Online training is likely to remain one means of disseminating information about emerging policies, procedures and organisational priorities. Nevertheless, it is clear that expectations of its practical learning outcomes need to remain modest. It is worth supplementing online training with facilitator-led classroom learning aimed at informing officers not only of policy and procedure, but also of the instrumental value of enhancing services to victims of crime, such as improved witness cooperation, facilitating the flow of information to the police from the community, and the broader enhancement of public satisfaction with policing in Victoria. Resource constraints mean that these packages would most likely need to be targeted at particular stations in the first instance. It is also important that such training be evaluated.

10. Front-line supervisor training

The findings revealed significant variation in supervision practices across the stations, which impacted on the general attitude toward victim support within the station and the ways in which support processes
are implemented and prioritised. We recommend that training for front-line supervisors include a broader discussion of the importance of the police–victim interface for achieving witness cooperation, for enhancing the flow of information to police, and for improving public satisfaction with policing. This research did not review current training programs for supervision roles; however, it is clear that the training of management staff as well as the review of their role should capture these aspects of policing, and Victoria Police is encouraged to take this into consideration when reviewing existing training programs and developing future programs.

Supervisors who understood and stressed the instrumental reasons for taking police–victim encounters very seriously were able to instil the importance of this approach without compromising the crime-fighting priority of police work. If front-line supervisors view victim-oriented policing as valid and useful, there is an increased chance that this view will cascade down to other front-line personnel. Moreover, it would be useful to reconvene supervisors at regular intervals (for example, every 12 months) to review strategies and evaluate whether such training is achieving the desired aims.

### External engagement recommendations

11. **Working party on property crime: Victoria Police and the Victims’ Charter Steering Committee**

Victoria Police deals with victims on a daily, individual basis and is able to identify that in many cases victims of property crime, particularly burglary, are poorly serviced within the victims’ services landscape in Australia. Given the role of Victoria Police, there is an opportunity to lead a working party to facilitate the integration of property crime as a relevant category within existing support mechanisms and within the *Victims of Crime Charter*. This will require liaison between the relevant government agencies to assess to whom and where such referrals might be made.

12. **Victoria Police–Multicultural Community Knowledge Exchange Programs**

The findings indicated that policing within multicultural communities is a significant challenge for many front-line officers. However, the nature of this challenge varies across the state, reflecting the increased growth and diversity in multicultural populations in different communities across Victoria. Challenges in this area reflected police being frustrated with having limited knowledge of cultural values and processes of particular groups, particularly in relation to newly established multicultural communities, and the perception that often these same communities had limited knowledge of, or simply misinterpreted, police processes and practices. Enhanced understanding and communication is critical here.

It would therefore be desirable to facilitate ‘knowledge exchange’ between front-line officers and multicultural communities wherever possible. This should be station-specific, as the extent to which this is required varies across the state, as does the ethnic/cultural make-up of newly settled communities within station jurisdictions across the state. These programs need to be targeted, not generalised, and should aim not to be a unidirectional dialogue in which police receive cultural awareness, but should allow police to express the difficulties they experience and to workshop possible solutions with the community in question. The programs could also facilitate greater knowledge of the values and culture of specific multicultural communities. Ideally, such exchanges should be relatively informal and would involve specific communities relevant to the area policed. While Victoria Police may determine the process for implementing such a recommendation, we would recommend the consideration of a coordinator who can oversee the development and implementation of such programs across the state to assist the development of a best practice model for implementation.
13. Victoria Police–service provider forums

This report has noted that effective and mutually beneficial relationships between Victoria Police and an array of victims of crime service providers are frequently forged as a result of the personal relationships between, and the proactive attitude of, individual officers and specific service provider staff. These practices should be enabled and encouraged wherever possible. We recommend, therefore, that Victoria Police trial Victoria Police–service provider forums in two locations, with a view to their potential roll-out across the state, pending evaluation. Representatives from service providers should be invited to present information about their service to front-line officers, and front-line officers and service providers should be given the opportunity to network and form effective professional relationships. These need not be overly frequent – one forum each six months should be sufficient. They might potentially be timed to coincide with read-outs, when the greatest number of personnel are present. This has proved extremely effective in some police forces in the United States and Canada. A similar concept was also reported as useful and effective when adopted at a station in Victoria.1


It emerged from the data that the interface between operational police and the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Health is widely perceived as problematic and dysfunctional by front-line police officers. The impacts on police are myriad: including impacts on efficiency, police response times and the maintenance of positive police–external agency relationships. It is imperative, therefore, that an inter-agency approach be adopted to scope these issues and collaboratively canvass potential solutions. We recommend that a relevant area of Victoria Police approach DHS with a view to forming a Joint Working Party to examine whether and how the interface between the two agencies might be improved. If the proposal receives assent from both agencies, terms of reference should be drafted collaboratively, taking into account the issues that have been raised in this research.

Dr Marie Segrave and Dr Dean Wilson, Monash University and University of Plymouth, 2011

1 We note that, at the time of publication, this recommendation should be reviewed in relation to the trial of SupportLink in some stations across the state, which may partly address this recommendation.
Abbreviations and presentation of findings

Abbreviations and acronyms

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<td>ACT</td>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
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<td>CAT</td>
<td>Crisis Assessment Team</td>
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<td>DHS</td>
<td>Victorian Department of Human Services</td>
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<td>HMIC</td>
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Presentation of data

As much as possible the words of participants are extracted from interviews without modification. However, to assist with readability and clarity of expression the use of additional words is noted via [] and where extraneous words have been removed this is noted via the use of ellipses (i.e. ‘...’).

Report conventions

This research sought and gained approval from the Monash Standing Committee on Ethics in Research with Humans [Project CF07/4750] and the Victoria Police Human Research Ethics Committee [VPHREC] (ref 32/07, approved 12 May 2008).

According to the provisions of the code of ethics, we note that confidentiality is an important aspect of this research, as we have asked Victoria Police members to reflect openly on their attitudes towards and experiences with victims of crime, and to report their views on the formal procedures in place within the organisation. For this reason, this report does not identify names or specific stations in the attribution of quotes. Rather, we refer to the rank and role of the individual police officer, the length of time they have been with Victoria Police, and their station. This means that quotations are not attributable to one specific individual, as there may be multiple participants from a station type who share rank, role and the length of time they have served with Victoria Police.

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2 The names and acronyms referred to in this report were correct at the time the research was undertaken, while some slight changes may have occurred since this time, there have been no substantial changes that impact on the findings.

3 The only exception to this is the four cases where the number of years of service was not specified in the interview and any quotations from these cases and this is noted after these quotations.
The roles and ranks are abbreviated for readability, according to the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Const.</td>
<td>Constable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snr Const.</td>
<td>Senior Constable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L Snr Const.</td>
<td>Leading Senior Constable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sgt</td>
<td>Sergeant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snr Sgt</td>
<td>Senior Sergeant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insp.</td>
<td>Inspector</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Court &amp; Custody</td>
<td>Court and custody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Crime Desk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIU</td>
<td>Crime Investigation Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>Crime Prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FV</td>
<td>Family Violence (refers to either a dedicated unit or a single officer whose role is to deal with family violence cases exclusively)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosecution</td>
<td>Prosecution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Region/Station management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLO</td>
<td>Multicultural Liaison Officer (additional role for Uniform members, not a separate role)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCAU</td>
<td>Sex Offence &amp; Child Abuse Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic</td>
<td>Traffic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniform</td>
<td>Uniform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W&amp;F</td>
<td>Weapons and Firearms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YLO</td>
<td>Youth Liaison Officer (additional role for Uniform members, not a separate role)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The station categories are determined based on population as described below:

- **Urban**: Inner-city Melbourne suburbs
- **Outer urban**: Outer Melbourne suburbs
- **Major regional**: Regional towns and cities with a population above 30,000
- **Regional**: Regional towns and cities with a population below 30,000
- **Remote**: This is used to indicate individuals based in single-officer outpost stations that come under the jurisdiction of a regional station.

This approach to attribution is designed to be indicative of context and we recognise that a population and proximity to the capital city as a means of distinguishing stations does not offer insight into the significant variation between stations within and across these categories. For example, there are substantial differences related to access to services depending on the location of a station within the state of Victoria, just as a range of factors including economic status, age and ethnic diversity within a location have an important bearing on the policing undertaken in any one station. The strength of this research is that this variation is borne out in the analysis and findings, and there is no value in the attribution of quotations to attempt to provide greater specificity.

In addition, all names of persons referred to by participants have been removed. However, where participants referred to other stations or locations the researchers have exercised discretion in removing the named place.
1.0 Introduction

Cultivating positive relationships between Victoria Police and the community is in practice largely mobilised through individual encounters between police and community members (Sherman 1998: 6), and it is as victims of crime that many members of the public experience such interactions. Since the birth of ‘professional policing’ in the mid-nineteenth century, police have been the primary agency to interact with victims of crime (Bowling & Foster 2002). However, while victims of crime have always been an important resource for information and evidence critical to the crime prevention and investigative functions of police, the promotion of victims’ rights and needs as a key concern for policing agencies has only gained traction within the last decade (Hoyle & Young 2003). Nevertheless, while a range of developments have seen a shift in police protocols regarding their interactions with victims of crime – often based on research with victims – there has been little research conducted with police that examines contemporary policing practices, including in relation to victims of crime, from a police perspective. Indeed, little recent Australian research has specifically investigated police perspectives on policing, or given police an opportunity to articulate their own concerns, and the highlights and challenges they face, in the ever-changing field of criminal justice policy and practice. The Station Study thus offers an important contribution to both Victoria Police – as a rich insight into the organisation’s practices and the perspectives of its members – and the national and international evidence base more broadly. It has been conducted at a time when victims of crime have increased in salience on the political agenda, both nationally and internationally, and policing roles are undergoing significant change. As we detail below, these changes are clearly identifiable in the Victorian context and they form the background to this study.

1.1 Victim protocols and frameworks in Australia

Over the past decade, victim-related protocols have been developed and implemented across Australian states and territories, and have had direct implications for the criminal justice system, including police forces and services. The victims’ charters developed in Australia are designed and operate differently within each state and territory, with varying levels of commitment to victims as consumers of criminal justice services. These charters are not all police specific. Many are state government commitments to the broader provision of services and support to victims of crime, and in many cases they establish a benchmark minimum standard for criminal justice professionals working with victims of crime, particularly in relation to the provision of service and support.

These instruments are in some instances charters adopted by policing services that set out commitments and obligations to victims of crime. This model operates in Queensland (QLD) and Tasmania, where police operate under non-legislated commitments to victim service provision. In New South Wales (NSW), police operate under both the Charter of Victims Rights, adopted by the organisation in 1996, and the Victims Support and Rehabilitation Amendment Act 2006. In the other states and territories, charters are legislated instruments which establish a legal obligation for the maintenance of specific service provisions. A legislated Victims’ Charter is in place in each of Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia (WA), the Northern Territory (NT) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).4

These developments reflect the increased recognition of the rights of victims of crime in Australia and beyond, as embodied by international instruments including the Council of Europe Recommendation on the Position of the Victim (1985) and the UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power (1985). Both the Australian and international instruments are not designed solely or specifically to address police service provision. They recognise the broader rights of victims of crime in relation to access to welfare, financial and other support, and to a minimum standard of treatment by service providers within and outside the criminal justice system. Generally within these instruments there is an understanding that police have three key responsibilities toward victims: to treat victims and their complaints with due courtesy and respect; to inform victims of crime of how to access assistance and compensation; and to provide victims with information and updates regarding the criminal justice and judicial processes (OHCHR 2003: 759–60). These responsibilities are in various ways embodied in the different victims’ charters in operation across Australia, including Victoria.

1.2 The Victorian Victims’ Charter and Victoria Police

The Victims’ Charter Act 2006 lays out the contemporary understanding of the needs and rights of victims of crime, recognising:

that all persons adversely affected by crime, regardless of whether they report the offence, should be treated with respect by all investigatory agencies ... and should be offered information to enable them to access appropriate services to help with the recovery process. (Victims’ Charter Act: s. 4b)

The Charter outlines the rights of victims and the obligations of criminal justice services (including police, courts, corrections and victims services) (Victims’ Charter Act: ss. 6–8).

For Victoria Police, the key obligations under the Charter include treating victims fairly; providing information regarding rights and the contact details of relevant support services (including counselling and compensation); taking care of victims’ property if it is required as evidence, and returning it once it is no longer needed; and providing updates on the progress of the victim’s case, including whether a charge has been laid and the process in court to follow (such as providing details on bail processes). The Charter includes a requirement that investigatory agencies, such as Victoria Police, take into account the diverse needs of persons based on their race, gender, culture, sexual orientation, disability, religion and age (Victims’ Charter Act: s. 6.2). It emphasises the importance of providing persons adversely affected by a crime (adopting a broad definition of ‘victims of crime’ that includes witnesses and secondary victims) with the necessary information regarding available victim support services in a ‘clear, timely and consistent’ manner (Victims’ Charter Act: s. 7a).

Since the implementation of the Charter in 2006, Victoria Police has developed and implemented policy and practice to meet the guidelines established by the Charter. This commitment is embodied in The Way Ahead Victoria Police Strategic Plan, the development of training programs to educate police members about their responsibilities under the Charter, and the introduction of a range of protocols and processes for victim interaction. These processes primarily involve changes to the electronic Law Enforcement Assistance Program (LEAP) system which require police to indicate whether victims would like any follow-up action after they have reported a crime to police, and keeping records of all contact with victims subsequent to them reporting an offence. The LEAP system generates reminders for police to contact victims, and functions as a managerial tool to ensure that the Charter’s commitments to victims are implemented. Much of this report focuses on police members’ knowledge of these developments and their reflections on these processes.
1.2.1 Specific commitments to groups of victims

The Victims’ Charter sets service standards and obligations to all victims. However, it is worth noting that Victoria Police and police services across Australia have also developed policing strategies and protocols targeted at key problems areas (such as repeat victimisation), specific types of victimisation (such as family violence) and particular community groups who may be vulnerable to crime (such as youth, the gay and lesbian community, or marginalised ethnic groups).

Over the past two years, Victoria Police has developed two key strategies aimed at reducing victimisation in specific categories of crime, and establishing improved protocols in relation to the delivery of information and services to victims. These strategies are complementary to compliance with the Charter. The Child and Youth Strategy and the Living Free from Violence strategy are focused on enhancing police services in relation to the victimisation of children, youth and women. These strategies require Victoria Police to work in collaboration with other agencies, reflecting the recognition that addressing victimisation, both broadly and specifically, requires input from a range of organisations.

Similar development of victim support processes targeted at specific groups has occurred across Australia. However, the focus of this research is on the more general measures that are designed to be inclusive of all victims of crime who come into contact with police. Protocols, policies and processes that govern the way police work with victims of crime have been introduced in Victoria, and across Australia, as a comprehensive response to meeting both internal (i.e. police agency commitments and policy) and external (e.g. legislative requirements) standards for responding to victims. Thus, this study focuses not on the well-researched, specifically resourced, specialised areas of victimisation (such as sexual assault and family violence), but on the broader, agency-wide measures.

1.3 The Station Study research

There is a strong consensus within the research literature that victims of crime tend to be less concerned with ‘the ability of police to apprehend the offender … than their [own] treatment by authorities’ (Wemmers 1999: 168; see also Skogan 2005; Norris & Thompson 1993; Wilkie et al. 1992; Skogan & Wycoff 1987). Moreover, it is well established that ‘when the police inform victims about the developments in their case, they are more satisfied with police performance and are more supportive of the police in general than victims who do not receive information’ (Wemmers 1999: 175). This has translated into police practice internationally. In Victoria, the electronic victim notification mechanisms within LEAP prompt police to provide information to victims at regular intervals, a development that reflects the increasing recognition of the need to systematise and monitor the provision of regular updates to victims on the progress of investigations.

Thus, in place of further research on victim experiences and attitudes, this research prioritised police perspectives. It sought to document police experiences, attitudes and work practices, and in so doing to develop an evidence base from which to identify recommendations for enhancing victim–police interactions in Victoria. The findings are focused on police experiences with victims, their understanding and attitude towards the role of police, and their management of policing roles and responsibilities in relation to victims on a day-to-day basis. Significant changes have been implemented across Victoria Police in the last decade and this research offers a unique opportunity to explore the attitudes towards, and impact of, these changes from the perspective of operational police. Rather than a large-scale quantitative examination of police attitudes, this study has opted for a qualitative methodology best suited to capture the daily challenges, attitudes and experiences of those engaged on the front line of the police–victim interface. Based on semi-structured interviews with more than 200 sworn police personnel
across Victoria, the Station Study is thus aimed at capturing the diverse issues that confront police in their daily interactions with victims of crime.
2.0 Aims of the research

The Station Study is a qualitative research inquiry focused on gaining insight into police understandings of and experiences with victims of crime, and the processes in place to provide support and information to victims of crime – in terms of internal policies and processes, and (formal and informal) linkages with external agencies. While Victoria Police has instigated many reforms in relation to police–victim interaction, this is the first qualitative study of police experiences that offers insight into and reflection upon the changes made to date. Critically, this research was not designed to assess policing practice but rather to enhance understanding of policing, particularly in relation to working with victims of crime. Specifically the research aimed to identify:

1. police attitudes towards victims of crime
2. the perceived quality of police interaction with victims of crime
3. the benefits and challenges of recent changes in Victoria Police processes and policies regarding police–victim interaction, specifically processes for ensuring that police communicate with victims of crime in a timely and consistent way
4. potential recommendations for Victoria Police to improve and/or enhance the management of victim–police interactions and victim notification processes.

The data generated in seeking to address these aims not only provides an important insight into the diverse experiences and attitudes of serving police across Victoria, but also contributes to an evidence base that can inform and facilitate the development of policy and practice that is cognisant of the complexities of contemporary police work.
3.0 Methodology

The decision to select certain research methods over and above others always generates some tension, as all methodological approaches have inherent strengths and weaknesses. It is therefore important to provide the rationale for the chosen methodology of this study, and to make some claims as to its validity for our stated purpose. There is a rich tradition of detailed qualitative research into police practice, commencing with the classic ethnographic studies of policing conducted in the 1960s (Banton 1964; Skolnick 1966; Westley 1970; Cain 1973; Rubenstein 1973; Reiner 1978; Punch 1979; Ericson 1982; Holdaway 1983; Smith & Gray 1985; Young 1991; Choongh 1997; Loftus 2009). Despite their enormous contribution to the field, such studies contain a weakness inherent to the ethnographic method generally: they provide thick descriptions yet of only limited settings. Moreover, ethnographic methods, while rich, are time and labour intensive (Bryman 2004; May 2001).

It is not surprising, therefore, that many research studies seeking to survey whole police workforces, or at least large segments of them, have tended to favour survey and questionnaire research models (Ask 2010; Phillips 2010; Page 2007; Chu & Sun 2006; Butler et al. 2003; Wortley 2003) alongside interviews (Haarr 2005; Wemmers 1999; Bryman et al. 1996) and observational research methods (Wuestewald & Steinheider 2009; Bradley & Nixon 2009). However, the questionnaire and survey research methods, in particular, can be criticised for their failure to allow researchers to ascertain how, and in what particular contexts, attitudes and values are shaped (May 2001). Therefore, if ethnographic approaches might be censured for being deep but narrow, qualitative approaches are also open to the allegation of being wide but shallow.

One response to this dilemma is to engage what has become something of a gold standard in criminological research: triangulation, which is the combination of several methodologies, frequently both qualitative and quantitative, to examine social phenomena (Bryman 2004). After conducting a pilot survey (Wilson & Colvin 2009) designed to identify the main issues, and values and perceptions of police, in relation to victims of crime, we decided, however, that this did not constitute an effective tool for answering the questions posed by the project. Rather, the responses to the open-ended questions in the survey pointed to the need to explore in more detail the rich and diverse views and experiences expressed by police across Victoria. Consequently, we determined that the most appropriate methodology for the purposes of our research was to conduct semi-structured interviews. In this regard, Tim May notes that ‘interviews yield rich insights into people’s biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings’ (2001: 120). They have also proved invaluable in police research in capturing attitudes, values and experiences (see, for example, Fielding 1988; Chan 2003). Insofar as our research objectives are to understand the experiences of, and attitudes towards, dealing with victims of crime over a vast and geographically dispersed organisation, semi-structured interviews also offered a comparatively time-effective research methodology that would provide contextually rich data. Thus, we chose to select stations from around Victoria that reflected the diversity and complexity of policing such a varied jurisdiction. Further discussion of the selection of locations, and our access to them, is presented below.

3.1 Undertaking collaborative police research

Researchers have traditionally remarked upon the difficulty of gaining access to police organisations and the challenge of gaining participants’ trust once access is granted (see, for example, Van Maneen 1988). Yet in the current research, this problem was largely alleviated due to the collaborative nature of the
project established from the outset. Following initial meetings with Victoria Police, a program of research was designed that suited both the pragmatic goals of Victoria Police and the academic interests of the university-based researchers. In this regard, researchers and practitioners alike have begun to highlight the benefits of research that is generated by collaborative work between police practitioners and researchers (Fleming 2010; Wilkinson 2010; Bradley & Nixon 2009; Wuestewald & Steinheider 2009; Perez & Shtull 2002; Laycock 2001). These more recent approaches to collaborative police research have placed increased attention on three key areas of research: police experiences of policing; the challenges police face in their work; and police attitudes towards their work, including their attitudes and experiences in working with the community.

A significant advantage of collaborative research of this kind is the ease of access to research participants that it enables, which might otherwise prove prohibitively difficult for academic researchers. Moreover, the participation of Victoria Police personnel within the Steering Committee in providing suggestions of appropriate stations that might participate and stations that covered areas of particular interest – either because of location or the community policed – proved crucial. This was invaluable ‘insider’ knowledge that facilitated the selection of a wide range of Victorian stations that are broadly representative of the variations seen across the state. Within each of the five Victoria Police regional divisions (as at November 2009), between three and five stations were identified as research sites. As this was a collaborative project, the Victim Advisory Unit (VAU) assumed the responsibility of contacting stations and arranging suitable interview times. The tireless efforts of the VAU team were instrumental in securing such a robust data set. Moreover, access to the station-level personnel, and the impressive cooperation we received at the stations, was also largely attributable to the collaborative nature of the research. Nineteen stations were included in the study, with a total of 204 participants, and the interviews were carried out between July 2009 and October 2010. They were conducted with a broad range of members, in terms of both rank (from constable up to inspector) and role, including Criminal Investigation Units, Uniform, Crime Desk, Sex Offence & Child Abuse Unit (SOCAU) Units, the Family Violence Unit, and Prosecution (an overview of participants is provided in Table 1 below). Yet the focus for this project was to target primarily Uniform rather than specialist areas due to the high volume and range of community members with whom they have daily contact and their experience of frequently being the first point of contact for victims of crime.

The information presented in Table 1 (below) is a summary of the profile of participants according to station type, (for a more detailed breakdown within each station see Appendix 1). As Table 1 reveals, the majority of participants (n = 153, 75 per cent) were in the lower to middle rankings (46 Constables, 97 Senior Constables, 10 Leading Senior Constables) and the majority were Uniform members or general duties members rather than specialised team members (n = 111, 54 per cent).
Table 1: Interview detail summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Station type</th>
<th>Stations (N)</th>
<th>N. participants</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Years w Vic Police (av.)</th>
<th>Years with VicPol (range)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>C (20)</td>
<td>Uniform (29) CD (4) CIU (7) FV (1)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1–37 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outer Urban</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>C (10)</td>
<td>Uniform (32) CD (8) CIU (11) Traffic (3)</td>
<td>16 (4 unrecorded)</td>
<td>5 months – 39 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major regional</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>C (8)</td>
<td>Uniform (22) CD (4) CIU (2) FV (3)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8 months – 39 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional (+ remote)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>C (8)</td>
<td>Uniform (28) CD (2) CIU (4) Traffic (5)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2 months – 35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>19 stations</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>C (46)</td>
<td>Uniform (111) CD (18) CIU (24) Traffic (10) Prosecution (6) Management (9) SOCAU (13) FV (6) W&amp;F (4) Court &amp; Custody (1) Crime Prevention (2)</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>5 months – 39 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Data collection and analysis

The interview questions were developed by the researchers in partnership with the Project Steering Committee. The initial design reflected the preliminary findings of the pilot survey (Wilson & Colvin 2009) and suggestions from the Steering Committee. The organisational and operational knowledge held by the Steering Committee members was instrumental in framing questions that were clearly understood and relevant to our research participants in terms of their occupational experience (see Appendix 1). The semi-structured nature of the interviews offered the advantage that points of particular interest could be
The interviews were governed by the protocols of the Standing Committee on Ethical Research on Human Subjects at Monash University and the Victoria Police Ethical Standards board. All participants were given an explanatory statement detailing the purpose of the study, their role within it, and the conditions of confidentiality. Prior to each interview commencing, the participant signed a consent form in order to formally acknowledge their consent. The duration of each interview was between 30 and 90 minutes, and the interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed. The transcribed data was uploaded into the qualitative data software program, NVivo, for the purposes of coding and analysis.
4.0 Police and victims: an overview

4.1 Introduction

The interface between police and victims is one of the most important in terms of police–citizen encounters. Despite the significance of this interface, only a scant body of research has yet addressed this issue directly. Moreover, the vast bulk of previous research has tended to focus on victim satisfaction, rather than police perceptions of these interactions. The extensive qualitative study presented in this report attempts to address this imbalance, and to explore the policy implications of the data collected. Interactions between police and victims of crime are of importance for three critical reasons. The first is that the police are greatly dependent upon victims of crime for bringing crime to their notice and for providing leads to offenders (Coupe & Griffiths 1999; Mawby 2007), and victims who are dissatisfied with police actions may fail to report offences in future. The second is that, despite the proliferation of various victims’ assistance programs, the police organisation is still the agency with which most victims have contact. The third reason is that police in many jurisdictions have traditionally provided a mediocre service to victims of crime, at times even aggravating the impact of crime through secondary victimisation rather than alleviating it (Mawby 2007; Van Dijk 1985). In the following discussion we provide a selective survey of the previous research that is pertinent to the present report.

The police, and policing practices, have always been dynamic and responsive to shifting community demands and expectations. In recent decades we have witnessed significant transformation in policing practice in both Australia and internationally, driven by two interconnected catalysts (Loader & Walker 2001; Bowling & Foster 2002; Segrave & Ratcliffe 2004). The first is the increased recognition of the critical role played by community support in contributing towards police effectiveness in monitoring and responding to both traditional (for example, crimes against the person, property crimes) and emerging crime types (such as terrorism-related offences) (see Pickering, McCulloch & Wright-Neville 2008; Innes 2006). This has involved an internal shift whereby policing agencies have identified the importance of investing in community relationships as part of, rather than as something separate to, investigative and crime-fighting priorities and practices. The second has been the growing influence of the victim movement, both nationally and internationally6, which has led to greater national and international recognition of the rights and needs of victims of crime. While police organisations across Australia have clearly always worked with victims of crime, it has been from Departments of Justice and Attorneys-General across the states and territories that the most recent push has come to develop specific commitments related to the provision of service to victims, and to recognise the broad range of rights to which victims of crime are entitled. These commitments provide a comprehensive framework for supporting and assisting victims of crime, within which police agencies are one of a number of state and non-state agencies with obligations and responsibilities.

Concomitant to the policy and practitioner developments in recognising and supporting victims of crime has been the burgeoning study of victims of crime driven by researchers and policy stakeholders. Research on victims has generally focused on two key areas: the needs of victims, and how these needs

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6 For example, the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power (29 November 1985: A/Res/40/34) called for all victims of crime to be treated with ‘compassion’ and ‘dignity’, and identified that victims of crime are ‘entitled to access the mechanisms of justice and prompt redress’.
can best be met by agencies within the criminal justice system (Sebba 2001). There is also a substantial body of literature that examines the police–victim of crime interface, with an emphasis on measuring the quality of the interaction through tracking victim experiences of and satisfaction with policing. For the purposes of this report we provide an overview of the key findings across these areas of scholarship, beginning with a discussion of the dominance of victim-oriented research, followed by a review of the research on police interactions with victims of crime, victim satisfaction with police, and the provision of support to victims.

4.2 The focus of victim research

Given that the term ‘victim of crime’ applies to a broad range of individuals and experiences, close attention must be given to its interpretation and application. Police interact with a range of victims of crime including both direct and indirect victims of crime, where indirect victims may include witnesses to a crime, and family or friends of a victim (Brandl & Horvath 1991). The victimisation police encounter also varies in terms of crime type and severity of crime. This diversity has consequences for how police respond to a call or complaint, what is required of police, and how victims respond to the actions of police. However, victim-focused research has tended to concentrate on specific groups of victims, defined by a common characteristic or the type of crime they have experienced.

Victimological research and police–victim research has primarily examined vulnerable populations who are victims of crimes, in particular children, the elderly and women (Sebba 2001; Finkelhor et al. 2001). Groups who are recognised as more vulnerable to victimisation and/or less willing (or less able) to report their experiences to police have long been the primary interest of criminological research in relation to the ‘dark figure’ of unreported crime. Women and children tend to dominate the victim-focused research because of the historical trend for their experiences to be ignored by police, the community and policy-makers. In particular, women and children who are victims of family violence and sexual assault have been the subject of decades of research. Policing has featured in this research literature as police are recognised as playing a critical role in responding to, intervening in and potentially preventing incidences of family violence (Rollings & Taylor 2008).

However, there has been some criticism of this focus. Rock (2006) has argued that the selective focus on specific ‘types’ of victimisation (such as victims of homicide, sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse or home invasion) has led to a limited research base and policies that meet the needs of only some victims. Primarily, this research has emerged out of feminist social work, sociology and criminology and has prioritised policing that addresses victims’ needs. However, there is also a significant body of work that has examined the provision of victim support from a policing perspective, where the emphasis is on police performance. The Station Study is located within this latter field of research, interested in police experiences and practices, recognising that to best meet victims’ needs it is critical that we understand the demands of policing and the attitudes and experiences of police who interact daily with a range of crime victims. Within this body of research the emphasis is on examining police performance based on police interactions with victims, and more broadly on all victim experiences with police regardless of the type of crime they have experienced. The key findings in these research areas are outlined below.

4.3 Police interactions with victims of crime

Given that police are typically the first, and in many cases the only, point of contact with the criminal justice system for a victim of crime (Rosenbaum 1987; Skogan & Wycoff 1987), many researchers emphasise the critical role police play in providing a ‘timely, appropriate and effective’ response to victims (Rollings & Taylor 2008: 1). The importance of this initial interaction relates not only to the
specific case (for example, the decision as to whether to pursue charges and/or assist with investigation and prosecution), but also to victims’ future decisions about whether to report crime (Finkelor, Wolak & Berliner 2001; Rosenbaum 1987).

Research on this subject has highlighted the need to enhance police interaction with victims to ensure consistency in the level and quality of service provision, while also enabling police to take into account the specific needs and circumstances of particular groups. For example, in the area of domestic and family violence specific policing strategies have been developed, and a research base built, over the past three decades that reflect the understanding that domestic violence requires a specific type of response from police (and other agencies) because of its unique qualities. However, research that has sought to measure victim satisfaction with police has generally been conducted with all potential victims of crime via broad survey instruments.

More recently, research has begun to emerge that emphasises the need for policing practices and programs to be culturally sensitive to victims’ needs (Skogan & Wycoff 1987). For example, Chui and Ip’s (2005) study of the interaction between QLD police officers and Chinese youth demonstrated the importance for police practices to be based on an awareness of the potentially diverse cultural needs of victims in relation to their age and position within ethnic minority communities. In part, the work that has examined the needs and experiences of specific groups of victims has emerged out of the well-established body of policing research focused on victim and community satisfaction with police.

Thus, what has arisen out of the policing-focused research is this bifurcation of research approaches: research with the community and research with police. In bringing this scholarship together, it is evident that policing research has made a significant contribution by identifying how police attitudes have a significant impact on their work, and subsequently on the perceptions of the victims they service. This field of research has examined a wide range of police attitudes, with recent studies looking at attitudes towards the use of force (Phillips 2010); discretionary decision-making (Wortley 2003); job satisfaction (Butler et al. 2003); specific crimes and crime victims (Ask 2010; Dejong et al. 2008; Page 2007); and types of offenders (Logan et al. 2006). Most relevant to this report is research on the attitudes of police towards specific types of victims of crime (Ask 2010; Dejong et al. 2008; Page 2007). In examining this subject, previous studies have found that police officer perceptions of a victim’s behaviour and reaction to a crime differ according to the type of crime committed (Ask 2010). In relation to both rape and domestic violence there is evidence that, despite significant training to break down traditional, gendered assumptions about ‘real’ victims, some police continue to expect victims of domestic violence and rape to act in particular ways and doubt the veracity or seriousness of the claims of victims who do not act ‘like victims’ (Ask 2010). There has been a concerted research effort to identify what distinguishes police who are more likely to hold such attitudes due to the potentially significant implications such attitudes may have for police responses to reports of victimisation. However, there is no consistent view on the impact of education and work experiences, age or gender in relation to police attitudes (see Page 2007; Butler et al. 2003). Despite this, victim satisfaction remains a high priority for policing agencies across Australia, and internationally in countries such as the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US).

4.4 Victim satisfaction with police

The research on the police–victim interface tends to focus primarily on victim experiences with and perceptions of police. There is a substantial body of work that has sought to quantify levels of victim satisfaction with police, with varying results: from research suggesting that the majority of crime victims are generally satisfied with the police (Garcia & Cao 2005; Skogan 2005; Coupe & Griffiths 1999; Brandl &
Horvath 1991), to reports that victim satisfaction is generally low (Norris & Thompson 1993). State and territory police organisations in Australia do not collect routine data on victim satisfaction with police services and interactions (Rollings & Taylor 2008). However, data on community satisfaction with police is produced annually by the Australian Government through the Report on Government Services and by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) through the National Survey of Community Satisfaction with police services. While it is acknowledged that complete victim satisfaction with police officers is not the objective policing agencies ought to pursue (Sced 2004), victim satisfaction remains a popular (although limited) measure for determining the quality and effectiveness of police services.

Generally speaking, Australian research findings reveal that the substantial majority of those who initiate contact with the police report their satisfaction with the service provided (Sced 2004; ABS 2000). More specifically in relation to victims of crime, the most recent ABS Population Survey Monitor (2000) found that 50.6 per cent of persons reported being satisfied with the services provided by the police and a further 15.3 per cent were very satisfied with the police services. The ABS survey revealed that a smaller sample of only 2.3 per cent of persons reported being very dissatisfied with the police, and 10.9 per cent were dissatisfied. Importantly, where dissatisfaction is reported it is not always specific to police failings of duty but may be indicative either of potentially unrealistic expectations of what police are able to do and/or a broader reflection of the criminal justice system as a whole. For example, in Young’s research participants reported: disappointment over the outcome of their complaint; the perception that the police had not done enough to investigate the offence; and dissatisfaction that the police had not apprehended the offender or that their property had not been recovered (1997: 382). It has been research in this vein in Australia, and other nations such as New Zealand, the US and the UK, that has resulted in an emphasis on the importance of police providing information to victims regarding the criminal justice process at the initial contact, and ensuring that victims are kept up to date on the progress of their case. This is based on a broad body of research that has concluded that victims who are regularly updated and kept informed regarding developments in their case are more satisfied with police performance and generally more supportive of the police than those who receive no information (Wemmers 1999; Skogan 2005; Sced 2004; Coupe & Griffiths 1999; Stephens, Bishop & Jose 2007; Skogan 2005; Young 1997; Norris & Thompson 1993; Wilkie et al. 1992; Skogan & Wycoff 1987). In many ways these findings indicate that a key component of policing is ensuring a positive interaction when a crime is reported. A significant body of work (cf. Skogan 2005; Young 1997; Brandl & Horvath 1991) has recognised the importance of the professionalism and attitude of the individual officer in relation to victim levels of satisfaction with police, whereby:

Police are judged more by what physicians might call their ‘bedside’ manner. Factors such as how willing they are to listen to people’s stories and show concern for their plight are very important, as are their politeness, helpfulness and fairness. (Skogan 2005: 310)

Professionalism in this context relates to an officer’s ability to fulfil their duties and obligations to the victim, while treating the victim with respect, courtesy and concern. Professionalism needs to be maintained from the initial contact and interaction, through to the management of victim perceptions and expectations during the investigative process and up until the point of resolution. Such a commitment to professionalism in the police–victim interaction is reflected in the emerging emphasis on managing victim perceptions by providing information on the progress of police investigations beyond the initial reporting of the crime. These developments also demonstrate the increased awareness of researchers and policing organisations alike that the majority of police work is undertaken beyond the purview of the general public and that these person-to-person interactions play a vital role in the overall
public perception of police and the decisions made by victims of crime regarding their contact and cooperation with police (Norris & Thompson 1993: 528; Brandl & Horvath 1991; Sced 2004).

In examining victim satisfaction with police and the ways in which police seek to manage and positively impact levels of satisfaction, research findings have consistently highlighted a range of significant influential factors, including gender, age, ethnicity, culture and the (residential) location of the victim and the crime, as well as the type of crime experienced. For example, research into the impact of the variable of victim age on victim satisfaction with police officers has revealed that younger victims tend to be less satisfied with the police than their older counterparts (Keenan 2009; Sced 2004; Kusow, Wilson & Martin 1997; Brown & Benedict 2002). Some research on residential location has indicated that this is the most significant predictor of levels of victim satisfaction with police (Kusow et al. 1997; Weitzer & Tuch 2005; Coupe & Griffiths 1999; Kusow, Wilson & Martin 1997). Research into the experiences with the police of majority and minority ethnic groups also consistently indicates that minority groups tend to be dissatisfied with police based on a perception that police do not view them as legitimate victims of crime, and therefore do not take their victimisation as seriously as they do that of others (Garcia & Cao 2005; Skogan 2005; Weitzer & Tuch 2005; Keenan 2009). These findings suggest that more nuanced approaches to dealing with crime victims is necessary for maintaining and/or obtaining high levels of victim satisfaction.

4.5 Prioritising satisfaction: the importance to police

Previous research into the implications of low victim satisfaction with police officers and services has often been underpinned by a concern that a victim’s negative experiences with or perceptions of police can impact both the individual (for example, emotional and financial impacts as a result of victimisation being unaddressed and needs unrecognised) and the provision of policing services (Norris & Thompson 1993). Police organisations are less able to fulfil their mandate if the community does not report crime, and international research consistently reports that victims who are dissatisfied with their encounters with police are likely to dissuade other victims from reporting crimes in future (Weitzer & Tuch 2005; Norris & Thompson 1993).

In addition to victim and community satisfaction with police officers and services, national and international research has drawn attention to the importance of police job satisfaction. A significant body of work has established that how police treat victims of crime is closely dependent on their level of job satisfaction (White et al. 2010; Dantzker 1994; Dowler 2005; Dantzker & Kubin 1998). Connected to the study of job satisfaction is the body of work that explores police experiences of victimisation – both as private individuals outside work and in the line of duty. National and international research in this area has focused predominantly on police officers as victims of physical assault while on duty, most often when conducting arrests (Griffiths & McDaniel 1993; Margarita 1979). Framing assaults and abuse as victimisation has been a controversial approach given that often these experiences are understood, and trivialised, as merely an occupational hazard of the job (Margarita 1979). However, this work has contributed to the broader recognition within policing agencies of the impact of stress; the emotional and physical toll of experiencing victimisation; and the need to establish internal mechanisms of support for police in order to prevent high attrition rates, high levels of stress leave and a workforce that is unhappy and/or cynical (Martinussen et al. 2007; Scott 2004; Volanti et al. 2002; Burke 1993; Kroes 1985). It is through the promotion of a positive and healthy work environment that policing can be improved, and consequently that police interactions with the public can become more efficient and professional.
What this body of research highlights is the importance of attending to police experiences of their work, including their interaction with victims of crime, in order to contribute towards an understanding of how to ensure positive experiences of policing, for both victims and police personnel. However, research in relation to police experiences within the job generally, and the connection between these experiences and their interactions with victims of crime, remains limited.

4.6 Supporting victims

In considering the different types of victims that come into contact with the police, research has also examined whether the type of crime to which a person is a victim impacts the type of services, or level of policing services, they receive following the crime. Traditionally, victim needs have been categorised primarily according to the type of crime (where victims of interpersonal violence are seen to require psychological support and victims of property crime require no support or property-focused crime prevention advice), and/or the type of victim (where women, older people and children are seen to require more support, in the form of psychological support, than do men). This approach is embodied in the policies of Australian police agencies, compared to other nations such as the US and the UK where the tradition of victim support has developed in slightly different ways. Rock (2006) highlights this difference in his comparison of Australian and UK responses to victims of crime, where he traces the historical focus on victim services for serious interpersonal crime (homicide, domestic violence and rape) in Australia and, subsequently, the centrality of trauma and professional counselling as the model of victim support. This has resulted in victims of volume crime, such as theft, burglary and malicious damage, being largely overlooked in terms of police processes and community provisions of support in the Australian context. However, a significant field of research dedicated to victim support services has established that support is needed not only by victims of more serious offences but also by victims of these more ‘mundane’ crimes, including property offences (Kilpatrick & Acierno 2003; Winkel & Vrij 1998; Shover 1991; Maguire 1991). This body of research has challenged the assumptions on which victim support processes have been founded, arguing that they are misplaced (Davis et al. 1999: 113); it has influenced approaches to victim support, and led to changes in policing practices. Yet little research has examined the provision of victim support by police or its effectiveness (Wilson & Segrave forthcoming). The present research, in part, contributes towards developing a more comprehensive understanding of such processes.

4.7 Conclusion: existing research and this study

While much is known about the importance of victim support, and commitments to this agenda continue across Australia and internationally, the delivery of victim services within police organisations has been the subject of limited attention by researchers (for some exceptions, see Ekman & Seng 2009; Lutshaba, Semenchuk & Williams 2002; Mawby 1999). Yet victim interactions with police, as the most common first responder, are a key element of the victim experience. The research outlined above related to the police–victim interface covers a broad range of approaches: some driven by victim-focused researchers, others driven by a concern with policing. Often the overlap is a commitment to enabling police to better do their job while also ensuring that victims of crime receive the most effective and appropriate service from police. There is, however, a dearth of research that has examined the contemporary provision of victim support by police or the effectiveness of these processes in Australia by drawing on police attitudes and experiences based on their day-to-day work. The Station Study research has been undertaken to examine the existing police–victim interface in Victoria, to explore the validity and expedience of current protocols in place, and to document how working with victims of crime is
understood and experienced by police officers themselves within the broader context of policing in the Victorian community.
5.0 The police role

This section is focused on outlining two major ways in which the police role in dealing with victims of crime is defined. The first defines the role through both external and internal policy instruments and procedures. The second interpretation comes via a more contextual and subjective means whereby operational police demarcate the boundaries of their role within a broader policy framework. While there have been significant shifts in the past few decades in styles and practices of policing, the core policing tasks continue to be perceived within a crime-fighting, law-enforcement paradigm (Reiner 2000). Nevertheless, there is growing recognition that improving police interactions with victims of crime is not necessarily incongruent with a crime-fighting orientation in police operational culture. For the purely instrumental reasons of needing to solve cases and to increase the flow of information provided by the public by building their trust in policing, improving victim satisfaction with police responses is a laudable goal. This is highlighted by research into community attitudes towards police that has shown that the most positive attitudes are held by those who have never had contact with police, not by those who report recent interactions with police as victims of crime (Sims & Myhill 2001; Skogan 1995, 1996).

Any discussion of police perceptions of their role in relation to victims of crime is, however, inseparable from the issue of how police work is perceived generally within the broader police culture. The literature on ‘police culture’ is vast, and the subject engenders considerable and heated debate, particularly in relation to the question of the potential for cultural change within police organisations (Chan 1996, 2003; Reiner 2010; Loftus 2009). However, there are enduring characteristics of police cultures across jurisdictions that are pertinent to the present discussion. In a recent ethnographic study of policing in northern England, Loftus noted that ‘detection and catching [of] offenders was elevated as the core justification for policing … [while] in contrast responsibilities such as completing paperwork and attending incidents which involved a service element were not considered authentic policing experiences’ (Loftus 2009: 91–92). Importantly, this perception remained unchanged among police in Loftus’s study despite emerging from a police organisation that had undergone significant cultural change in terms of policy and composition (Loftus 2009). The implications of this ‘action-oriented’ perspective on police work are significant for police–victim encounters. As Mawby suggests:

It seems that the nature of policework, and particularly the way police interpret their jobs and the aspects of their work they value, may mean that victim-oriented work is accorded less priority than crime-fighting, in much the same way that community policing is commonly undervalued. (2007: 215)

Our initial explorations into this question indicated that role perceptions within Victoria Police were considerably more nuanced and less overwhelmingly action-oriented than such assertions might suggest. We conducted an initial pilot survey which included the open-ended question: ‘What is the police role in victim support?’ While the majority of respondents saw providing support to victims as part of their role, and responded with functional terms such as ‘providing support’, ‘being honest’ and ‘keeping victims informed’, others clearly viewed dealing with victims of crime as a distraction from ‘real’ police work. Thus, one respondent remarked that the role of the police was ‘to make sure criminal matters are investigated and suspects taken to court, full stop’, while another commented that ‘we have enough to do without ensuring victims’ needs are met’ (Wilson & Colvin 2009). Consequently, through the interviews we sought to investigate in greater detail these divergent perceptions of the police role in dealing with victims of crime.
More broadly, the interviews were also intended to explore police experiences and perceptions of the policy frameworks and protocols, while also asking participants how they personally perceived the police role in relation to victims of crime. Given the significant changes that have occurred in recent years in Victoria, with the adoption of the Victims’ Charter and the changes to recording practices within Victoria Police such as LEAP recording requirements, we were interested in how policy and procedural transformations have altered practice.

As outlined earlier, the Victims’ Charter and the changes to LEAP recording processes have been introduced relatively recently, and require police to record their ongoing follow-up with victims who indicate that they would like further contact subsequent to their first interaction with police. The interviews invited police to reflect upon these changes and requirements, and discuss their attitudes towards them, as well as the impacts of these developments, beneficial or otherwise. We also asked questions about training and preparation for interacting with, and providing support to, victims of crime. Here we examined three forms of training: academy training, on-the-job training and online training. Lastly, this section explores the role of front-line supervisors in shaping individual officers’ perceptions of victims of crime.

5.1 Perceptions of the police role

Before turning to an examination of how existing processes and protocols are perceived at the station level, it is first important to discuss perceptions within Victoria Police of police obligations towards victims of crime. As our pilot survey indicated, opinions are quite varied on this issue, so it is meaningless to talk in terms of one homogenous view. Clarifying the role police should take in responding to victims of crime is exceedingly complex. On one level there are the provisions of the Victims’ Charter and the internal policies and procedures aimed at imposing broad service standards on police members. On another level there are perceptions of the relative importance of dealing with victims of crime in relation to other policing tasks. However, before proceeding with this discussion it is vital to acknowledge one point: while responsibilities towards victims of crime are clearly defined and a central aspect of the work of specialist units such as the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse (SOCA) units, the Family Violence Units and the Homicide Squad, the role of general duties officers in this regard is considerably less well defined. One general duties respondent to the pilot survey succinctly remarked that the role of front-line police in relation to victims of crime is ‘ill-defined by our organization’ (Wilson & Colvin 2009a). This resonated with the findings of the Station Study, where participants reiterated both the ill-defined nature of the police role in relation to victims of crime and the importance of this role in the day-to-day work of front-line officers. As one officer noted, ‘victims are a big part of the job and it’s a really varied part of the job’ (Major regional, Insp.(Management), 28 years with Victoria Police). The following subsections examine participant views concerning the police role in interacting with victims, in relation to several related issues. First, we look at the problems police experience in attempting to delimit the boundaries of their obligations. We then examine the differing operational styles that influence the way dealing with victims of crime is perceived within the broader context of other police work.

5.1.1 Drawing the line

For specialist divisions such as the Homicide Division and the Major Crash Investigation Unit that routinely deal with fatalities, extended and often intense dealings with victims of crime are routine (Wilson & Colvin 2009b, 2009c). For general duties officers, however, who deal with a multitude of victims of crimes of variable degrees of severity, the boundaries and intensity of interaction with victims are considerably more fluid and amorphous. Thus, the degree of involvement is contingent on a number
of factors, including the level of contact individual victims seek, the time and resources available, and the disposition of the individual officers. During the interviews, officers commented on the difficulty of establishing a clear end point to the victim support role, given that the role is not well defined. One officer remarked:

I think we do look after them, but at some stage you have to let them go. I mean … police [are] not counsellors, so you can’t be going on [communicating] two years later with the victims. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Multicultural Liaison Officer], 20 years with Victoria Police

Another participant directly referred to the difficulty of ‘drawing the line’ in relation to interactions with victims of crime:

It’s a fine line. How far do we go? We could maintain contact over an extended period of time. Do we once it goes to court forget about them as well? Do we not have a six-month follow-up after the court date? I mean, where do we draw the line? Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Crime Desk], 26 years with Victoria Police

For some officers, the solution to the dilemma of ill-defined obligations is to adopt a minimalist approach. One officer, for example, was very clear about where police responsibility begins and ends:

I mean the victim only wants to do so much. Express what has happened and make a report, make a statement, that’s virtually the police’s role, there’s not much else you can do. We’re not equipped to do anything else. You’re not a counsellor. Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 8 years with Victoria Police

One point that was reiterated repeatedly throughout the interviews across the state was that police officers are not counsellors. This observation embodies the tensions between competing visions of the police role. Nevertheless, we identified a variety of ways in which officers reconcile the apparent contradiction between what might be termed ‘victim-oriented’ policing and crime-fighting policing. It is hardly surprising that this should be so. Police occupational cultures are not monolithic, and numerous studies have developed typologies of police orientations and styles (Reiner 2010). For the purposes of the present study, we examine three broad categories of disposition towards work with victims of crime: ‘victim-oriented’, ‘pragmatists’ and ‘crime fighters’.

5.1.2 The public service mandate

The police role has long been considerably more expansive than one of crime control alone – a point noted in numerous historical and contemporary studies of police work. Embracing a more expansive mandate has received impetus over the past few decades from the growing international popularity of ‘community policing’ (Segrave & Ratcliffe 2004). Although the term itself, and the validity of the many and varied approaches that come under its umbrella, generates heated debate, its central tenets have had some influence on police cultures. Some participants emphasised the ‘service workers’ view of police and their role in relation to dealing with victims, echoing the stipulations of the Victims’ Charter that require police to provide victims with respectful treatment and regular information on the progress and the outcome of their cases. Many participants made reference to the broader service role of police by identifying the range of roles police perform. Exemplary here was one participant’s comment:

You join the job to put on the many different hats. One time you have to be a marriage counsellor … sometimes you have to be a babysitter. Another time you have to be the bloke
who’s putting handcuffs on someone because they’ve ... committed an offence. Urban station, Const. [Family Violence Unit], 1 year with Victoria Police

Within this context of service provision, a handful of participants viewed victims as the primary responsibility of police:

[O]bvously we have a huge duty of care ... probably 100 per cent duty of care in relation to victims. Outer urban station, Snr Sgt [CIU], 25 years with Victoria Police

We have a duty to obviously keep them up to date, ensure that if they require counselling, if they require assistance in court, if they require any other needs, that they’re taken care of. Every victim should be treated obviously as best that we can. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [CIU], 10 years with Victoria Police

Basically we’re there to provide support, knowledge for the victim. They’ve come to us for a reason, they’ve been a victim of a crime, so it’s our job to support them and do as much as we can for them I suppose. Regional station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 4 years with Victoria Police

Generally very few police specifically identified victim support as a primary function. However, a significant minority of opinions expressed by senior and long-serving police, as well as more junior and recent recruits, embraced an overall service-provision approach to policing as opposed to a reactive crime response model. Critically, these attitudes and interpretations of the role as a broad one fed into perceptions of the protocols and strategies currently in place on providing support to victims:

[Police should go] at least to a point where you know [the victim is] getting the assistance that they require. So they may not have the ability or the means to get assistance, but if you can put something into place, it might just be a phone call and pass on a phone number, and then you just follow it up to see that they’ve been contacted, and I think to that point at least, obviously there’s limits to how far you need to go, but with certain circumstances sometimes it’s as little as a phone call and it just makes a huge difference to that person. Just even if it’s just 10 to 15 minutes listening to what they’ve got to say, and that’s all they needed, just someone to listen to, and they’re satisfied with that. Outer urban station, Const. [Uniform], 2 years with Victoria Police

5.1.3 Pragmatists

There are compelling practical reasons why victims of crime are important to police. As numerous studies have found, these reasons include that victims provide leads to offenders and assist as witnesses in prosecutions, but also, more broadly, that securing the general cooperation and trust of the public, including victims, helps to ensure they will act as sources of information on crimes and cases. These pragmatic concerns are not lost on many front-line police, who are aware that appropriate interactions with victims of crime are likely to prove invaluable in the detection and prosecution of offenders. As one officer noted:

if we want [victims’] assistance to help us to do our job we’ve got to give them the assistance in return; it’s a two-way street. We don’t get anything if we don’t give them something as well. Regional station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 7 years with Victoria Police

While such instrumental motivations may appear to lack empathy, this is not necessarily problematic if victims of crime are treated respectfully and kept informed as a result. Moreover, instrumental considerations can easily coexist with a victim-oriented style. A Crime Investigation Unit officer, for
example, expressed both a pragmatic rationale for fostering the trust of victims in the criminal justice system subsequent to a police encounter and a genuine concern for the distress of individual victims:

Every victim should be treated obviously as best that we can because not only ... this might sound a bit sucky, but if it was your family member, you would want them treated exactly the same. Nothing would piss a policeman off more than to know that someone hadn’t treated their family member how they think they should be treated. And they’re potential jurors at the end of the day as well. *Outer urban station, Snr Const. [CIU], 10 years with Victoria Police*

5.1.4 Crime fighters

A smaller sample of participants argued that, while victims do comprise a major component of their encounters with the public, their focus is generally not on victims of crime. Indeed, a number of participants observed that it is rare for the topic of conversation among police officers to be victims and/or the provision of victim services. Furthermore, some saw the police role as falling within a very narrow crime-fighting framework within which victims are witnesses:

I mean when you look at what our primary role is, which is to protect the public, keeping the streets safe and all the usual type things you hear, that’s what we’re there to do. We’re there to prevent crimes. *Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Traffic], 8 years with Victoria Police*

Where do we draw the line between what we are as police officers and [what] they want us to be [which is] social workers? Whose responsibility is that? I’m here to investigate a crime. I’m here to see well if someone has committed that crime, identify the person, charge them and put them before a magistrate. Where does it come in now that I suddenly have to be a social worker and I have to liaise with this victim and refer them to that person and ring them up a week later and see what they’ve done next? It’s just increasing the workload of general duties members or any member. *Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Crime Desk], 26 years with Victoria Police*

While some officers acknowledged the value of working with victims of crime, they viewed this aspect of their job as a low priority in contrast to the ‘real’ police work of catching offenders. As one officer stated:

I think it’s important but it comes secondary to actual investigation of the crime itself. I mean I guess it depends on what unit [or] ... area you work in, but it’s secondary to the actual physical work that you have to go out and do yourself, because [the investigation is] ... what takes up most of your time, and that’s where you’re catching your offenders. *Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 3 years with Victoria Police.*

Some participants were very clear that their responsibility to victims is, and must be, limited:

I don’t think we should be responsible for... ensure[ing] that the victim gets the counselling they need to get, or has access to those sorts of things. At the end of the day, we’re here to catch crooks and put them before the court. *Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 9 years with Victoria Police*

Overall, the majority of police interviewed defined their role according to a crime-fighting mandate of investigation – a perspective that appears to be largely reinforced when police move from the academy to the station, despite finding that police are called upon for a diverse range of tasks on a daily basis. The extent to which police focused on the crime-fighting approach was often reflected in their attitudes
towards the provision of assistance to victims and the degree to which they articulated a resentment towards or frustration with the notification process.

5.2 Location, resources and time

The three typologies of operational dispositions towards dealing with victims of crime outlined above (public service, pragmatist, crime-fighting) are mediated by three broad factors: location, both in terms of geographical station and particular unit within the organisation, perceptions of workload and available time, and the level of resourcing perceived to facilitate working with victims. Each of these is discussed in turn below.

5.2.1 Location

A major difference was identified in the nature of interactions with victims of crime between urban and rural stations. Broadly speaking, policing in smaller regional and rural communities was viewed as enabling more intense and ongoing relationships with victims of crime than was feasible in urban stations, given their busy routines. Moreover, in smaller stations where a small number of police dealt with a clearly defined community through extensive contact, police members felt more responsible for ensuring that community members are satisfied with the service provided. This was a point frequently made by officers who had experience of both urban and rural contexts, as the following examples make clear:

And I suppose in terms of the country, again, because people know who you are, there’s more – I don’t know whether it’s accountability but maybe it is to a point because you know that you’re going to see them. There’s only 10 coppers and whatever in the town so you know that you might see them down at the supermarket with your wife or whatever so you’ve got to do the right thing by them, not that you wouldn’t anyway but it just sort of reinforces it. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Prosecutions], 12 years with Victoria Police

[KN]owing a few of my friends who are out at small stations, they’re more personal with the people than what we are here, because we just have a high volume of people coming through whereas they get a chance, and more time, to actually speak with people, whereas we’re always on the go here so we don’t [get that chance]. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 28 years with Victoria Police

The more victim-oriented approach adopted by police in smaller regional and rural stations reflects the importance placed on securing the cooperation of the community for the effectiveness of police work. As one officer from a rural station remarked:

It’s not that you take the confrontational approach in the city but you’re a lot more aware that in the country you’re part of the community in that you’ve got to have the support of them to do your job simply because, looking after number one, backup [is] half an hour away. So you learn to communicate pretty well. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Prosecutions], 12 years with Victoria Police

A number of police reflected on their experiences in different stations and the corresponding shift in their attitude towards and treatment of victims. Participants who had moved from inner-city suburbs to outer-city suburbs, and those who had moved from a city to a regional station, identified a shift in their role and their approach; however, this was also noticeable for participants who had moved stations within the city. The following comment reflects these differences:
Come night-time, working in the city, you’re basically a glorified security guard just trying [to stop] drunken brawl after drunken brawl you attend. But here … you’re dealing with people on a more personal level, whether that be your victims or your offenders, because although the residential area within the city is expanding, most of your offenders and victims are transients. They come from other areas. So they’d be in and out. I’ve been working in [this inner-city suburb] where generally the offenders and the victims reside in the area. You’re dealing with them more on a personal level. So you’re seeing the same faces around. You know who’s who …. There are segments of the community, yeah, you deal with more so and often. And then they know you. Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 5 years with Victoria Police

Differences between stations were found to be both geographical and socioeconomic. As this officer’s remarks reflect, the differences between suburban stations, which may even be adjacent, could be stark, based purely on the level of affluence of residents in each one:

In Williamstown a lot of it is public relations type [policing], keeping the public happy, it’s more proactive rather than active policing. Whereas here we mostly just respond to calls that come through triple zero because we’re busier. Urban station, Snr. Const. [Uniform], 11 years with Victoria Police

Generally the difference in location highlighted most by police participants was the regional/city divide, as all police in regional locations had some experience in city stations and/or another station prior to the one in which they were located at the time of interview. Consistently it was perceived that those in regional locations had more time to deal with victims of crime in an appropriate and satisfactory manner, in contrast to the experience of working within the busy metropolitan stations, where the work pressures were seen to be higher and the community more anonymous. As one officer noted:

The one I noticed so much is that you’re anonymous in the city, so where you move from job to job you do have contact but you tend to think, ‘I will never see this person again’, whereas in the country you know the person’s father, you know the kid, whoever you deal with, may be on the same football team, your son goes to school with, everything is connected. Regional station, Snr Sgt [Uniform], 25 years with Victoria Police

Significant differences were also identified between regional stations in terms of the demands and variety of police work undertaken. A number of participants emphasised that being in some regional areas translated into a workload equal to that found at city stations, but with greater variety. Discussion of the role of police and the pressures placed on them in different regions also facilitated discussion of how police manage their priorities, particularly in relation to meeting victims’ needs and fulfilling their broader obligations.

5.2.2 Time and resources

While many officers agreed in principle that dealing with victims of crime is an important aspect of their role, it was consistently asserted that the potential to fulfil this role was seriously curtailed by competing workplace demands and limited resources, and many felt that the frenetic pace of station activity precluded providing a desirable quality of service. The following comments from officers are exemplary here:

[Y]ou’re in here and you’re interviewing someone for an offence, and you’ve got 10 jobs on your plate out on the road, and D24 are ringing you, ‘How long are you going to be?’.... [I]n a perfect
world, if you live in an area where it’s quite safe ... you can take your time and do everything. But unfortunately if you’re busy and they struggle to put a van out on the road, all the Watch House is [focused] on [is] this main road and you’re pumped every single day, unfortunately it’s natural to not put in much time and effort, or be able to respond to people as you would like to. Outer urban station, Snr. Const. [CIU], 5 years with Victoria Police

it’s all based on time [and] resources. If we had more time, instead of going to each job, and this is not just over the counter, because we’re smashed up on the counter, but it’s on the road too, if we had more time, we wouldn’t just be able to go, okay, bandaid, there you go .... We’ve only got enough time to bandaid every single situation we go to .... I hated the job for the first year ... because I come from nursing where I was helping everybody and now I’ve come to this job where every situation you go into, every home you go into, you just go, ‘what can I do so this doesn’t come back to bite me on the arse, or you don’t call back again tonight?’ That’s all we’re doing really. Are we really helping anybody? Outer urban station, Const. [Uniform], 2 years with Victoria Police

Like we go to a job for say, cold burglary, which is very low priority because the offenders have left and we just need to take reports. This person’s just had their – their personal space has been violated. Someone that they don’t know has gone through all their stuff, and all that. We’ve got jobs piling up on our plate; we need to come get [the] ... details. Sometimes we don’t have the time to try to comfort them, explain to them the process and whatnot .... We definitely try to, and it’s always in the back of your mind, but sometimes we just can’t. Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 2 years with Victoria Police

As much as you try to give 100 per cent, you don’t have the time to do it all because while you’re in here doing paperwork for the victim that’s been ... robbed, hurt, whatever ... you’ve got the board constantly ringing on the phone saying, ‘How long are you guys going to be?’, ‘Well, as long as it takes’, ‘Okay, it’s just that the jobs are piling up out there’, and you can’t concentrate on what you’re doing knowing that...Outer urban station, Snr. Const. [Uniform], 5 years with Victoria Police

Alongside the common complaint that time was a scarce and precious resource emerged significant complaints about the difficulty shiftwork imposed upon maintaining regular contacts with victims of crime. The following scenario relayed by an officer emphasises the difficulty of dealing with victims adequately in the face of fragmented time schedules:

I always look [at it this way: that] my job is to investigate what happened and charge the people with the offence. I’m not a community worker or a counsellor or anything and I don’t have the training for it either. It is expected of me to do it and I’ve spoken to them on occasions or even when they call up and want feedback about what’s going on. So we’re investigating it, once they don’t call me every five minutes, which is wrong to do, but you just get 10 phone calls a night and you’re tired. I had three hours sleep between the shifts today, so I just want to go to bed. Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 2 years with Victoria Police

The following comments offered by a constable and a senior constable similarly reflect the difficulty of maintaining contact with victims of crime when required to undertake shiftwork:

Look I worked the morning shift today, I’m off tomorrow and then I start night shift for a week, have big changeovers, then I go on holidays. So basically if I get a file today there’s no
way I can follow it up in the next four, five weeks. Outer urban station, Const. [Uniform], 1 year with Victoria Police

It’s often quite hard because if you haven’t got an offender and you’re trying to do an investigation, it takes time, because you’re doing shift work and you might be on a night shift when you get an assault. And you can’t follow up with witnesses or anything for another week or two, and if they’re ringing every second day wanting to know what’s happening, and you keep going, ‘well, I can’t do anything, I’m on night shift’, because you don’t want to be going around to people’s houses at three am and getting them to sign a statement or whatever. Urban station, Snr Const.[Uniform] 5 years in Victoria Police

The reported state of perpetual busyness, related particularly in connection to work in divisional vans, was aligned with the perception that the burden of paperwork was increasing, as one officer claimed:

[Victim follow-up is a good thing] because over the years ... because of our workload we do a lot of paperwork and ... I would say the paperwork has gone up by a large percentage from when I first started. And I think that as a community service ... we’ve ... become busier with the paperwork side of it, we’ve forgotten to do the phone calls, the follow-up, the knock on the door that we used to do. I remember doing a lot more patrolling in the van, and being able to have time to knock on that victim’s door, or when you didn’t have anything on you’d go, ‘oh, I just want to follow up these couple of things that I can do’. There’s no time for that any more. Outer urban station, Leading Snr Const. [Uniform], 21 years with Victoria Police

It is worth examining the claim that police have neither the time nor the resources to deal with victims of crime in more detail, with reference to research in this area. At the outset, it must be stated that this is a perennial claim of front-line police identified in studies of policing across the Anglo-American world. Nevertheless, the idea that police are continually rushing from incident to incident is not borne out by empirical research into police activity. While there are times (weekend evenings, for example) and places (such as inner cities) where police may be in constant demand, this is the exception rather than the norm. Thus, David Bayley’s overview of extant research led to the conclusion that ‘rigorous studies of workloads tend to show that patrol officers have a considerable amount of uncommitted time’ (1994: 43; for a meta-analysis of studies in this area see Brodeur 2010). Why, then, is the assertion that limited time and resources prohibit more comprehensive encounters with victims of crime so persistently made? On this question, Bayley offers some valuable observations:

Most jobs are boring in part, but few people define their work in terms of those periods. Police officers, who are active, gung-ho people, naturally dwell on the purposeful, adventuresome side of their job. They tend to magnify the time spent actually ‘fighting crime’. It is hard for them to admit that they often simply drive around. Moreover, because their work is sometimes dangerous, it is easy for them to confuse the fatefulness of what they do with busyness. (1994: 43)

Our participants no doubt firmly believe that they work under considerable time pressures, and at times they no doubt do. It is also apparent that in terms of maintaining contact with victims of crime the rotations of shiftwork create real barriers to continuity and the appropriate timing of communication with victims. Nevertheless, the comments of the participants reveal much about the way police work and how they prioritise competing demands, to reveal a slightly different picture. Underpinning many of the interviews was a particular view of dealing with victims of crime: that it would be possible, and good, to spend more time with victims of crime if there were absolutely nothing else to do. This relates to the
question of police perceptions of their role in relation to victims of crime. Ensuring that victims of crime have more satisfactory encounters with police is inextricably linked to cultural transformation within the police organisation. The central barrier to such transformation is the tenacity of the crime-fighting operational style, which studies have revealed is a remarkably constant aspect of police culture, and one that is extremely resistant to change (Loftus 2009).

5.3 Management, accountability and procedures

This subsection looks at how new policies and procedures have been received within a complex, hierarchical organisation: Victoria Police. We first consider how these policies and procedures, which have been implemented by a centralised management, are being received by front-line officers. We then examine the issue of internal accountability; and lastly, we discuss the participants’ attitudes towards and perceptions of these new policies and procedures in relation to interactions with victims of crime.

5.3.1 Management

Any attempt to improve police responses to victims of crime inevitably occurs within the larger context of organisational change and management. There has been pervasive change in police organisations over the past three decades, one of the most notable of which is often termed ‘managerialism’. Managerialism refers to the introduction of private sector management techniques to the public sector. It is broadly characterised by an emphasis on outputs rather than inputs, and specific standards and measures of performance (Fleming 2009). The participants in this study expressed a significant degree of cynicism towards the introduction of recording procedures seen as remote and based on actuarial practices that prevented front-line police from carrying out active tasks such as reactive responses to calls and proactive patrol. One officer made this point forcefully:

Quite frankly it’s bullshit … They want more and more out of you but they’re giving you more and more to do and it’s just wearing people thin. You know you’ve got to do a running sheet and you’ve got to do another sheet that justifies your running sheet and you’ve got to do another sheet that says what you’ve done on the running sheet … Basically it’s just stats, for the stat people so they can justify their ivory towers really and come up with their whiz-bang things. So all we’re doing is just feeding people stats, we’re just statisticians. It would take at least half an hour, if you sat down and did it at the end of the day … this is where it’s stupid in the van, the observer does the running sheet and that sheet, and they’re forever looking down, they never get a chance to look around and be an observer because they’re too busy writing in bloody books or and that stupid sheet all the time. It’s frustrating. Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 28 years with Victoria Police

This perspective, which was certainly common enough among the participants, has important implications for how innovations in practice and procedure are received at the front line. Janet Chan’s 2003 study of police recruits in NSW noted that they fairly rapidly developed a cynical attitude towards police management, who were often viewed as out of touch with street-level practice, and, as one participant in her study remarked, with leadership ‘run by academics who have no idea’ (228). Moreover, such innovations, especially as they relate to reporting procedures, are often perceived as increasing the burden of paperwork. In this regard, one officer noted:

What’s our responsibility to the community? I suppose you’d want to look after your victims, you want to make sure that they’re safe and they’re happy with you and with the job. Sometimes you just don’t get the time to do it. Domestic violence has obviously come a long way in the last
couple of years with referral services and notifying this person, notifying that person. And I tell you what, that is such a drain ... from a police perspective and being able to do what we all joined the police force to do: patrol, keep our streets safe and arrest crooks and do all that sort of stuff, we just don’t do it anymore. You go from job to job to job, do your reports when you get the time but you don’t get the time to do the police job that you really joined up to do or that I joined up to do. So all this referral stuff is just ... where does it end? You spend so much time in front of a computer nowadays, where does it end? I like to treat a victim like a victim, give them compassion. But at the end of the day I can’t sit there and spend my whole day helping someone despite the fact that I might want to, I can’t. So you want a solution? I think the victim’s notification ... I don’t think ticking boxes on a form is really an appropriate way of judging the situation because one police member will give a shit and the other one won’t. Perhaps all assault-related reports should be reviewed by an exterior body, and then they take it from there. Maybe they need to go through to ... maybe they need to be filtered at the LEAP end of the central data entry and maybe filtered through to a different one that goes alright this is the pile we’ve got today. Outer urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 19 years with Victoria Police

Another senior constable commented:

If there’s something that there needs to be some statistic about, or they want to know more about it, then they’ll just throw more paperwork at you. It’s just something else that’s been decided, to follow the process and the guidelines and all that to liaise with them about the process, and continually update them, I just see it as something extra thrown at us, stuff like that is thrown at us every day that we have to do something extra. Urban Station Snr Const. [Uniform] five years with Victoria Police.

The risk that attaches to the perception that the new procedures for dealing with victims of crime are ‘whiz-bang theories’ imposed from on high, and represent an escalation in paperwork, is a lack of ‘buy-in’ on the part of front-line personnel. Thus, even where there may be sound instrumental reasons for improving police service delivery in a given area (in this case, for victims of crime), procedures and policies that are not well explained or justified will likely encounter resistance from those very officers who are responsible for implementing them.

5.3.2 Accountability

Police organisations generally have a high number of rules, regulations and directives that cover a vast array of activities. Police officers are thus constantly vulnerable to the possibility of breaching some or other regulation, which can lead to reluctance on their part to display any initiative or take responsibility for their actions (Bayley 1994). This can result in the oft-noted development of an attitude that prioritises ‘covering your arse’ among personnel. This point was explicitly conveyed by one officer, who remarked:

[A]rse covering’s just got to be done now because we’re so accountable. And you make a mistake now you get sued or the boss can dismiss you right off the field. That’s sort of horrifying. Outer urban station, Leading Snr Const. [Uniform], 39 years with Victoria Police

I worked the van here for nine years ... and you are under the pump. You’re under the pump but personally I enjoyed it [but] working the van ... is all about covering your arse. If I was to go back and work the van, that would be my priority, to cover my arse, because if you do anything wrong you’re put under the microscope. If you go to a domestic and something happens the next day or later that day, you’re the one under the gun, not the husband who’s beat her up, but the coppers,
and we get sued, we [get] demoted, we get looked at. You only hear from the bosses when you’ve stuffed up. *Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Crime Desk], 13 years with Victoria Police*

Internal accountability within the police organisation was thus primarily perceived as punitive, and as another aspect of police work that increased the demands on front-line staff. This point was highlighted by one of the officers:

It’s up to the individuals [how highly they value keeping up with victims] … The individual investigator, member, informant, generally some will go the full length, keeping them updated, where others don’t. And in my experience it’s not because of them not wanting to, it’s the workload and pressures, the bureaucracy and all that sort of thing they’ve got to contend with, let alone I guess victim updates. There’s a lot of deadlines, there’s a lot of court appearances. And I’ve noticed around town with ESD [Ethical Standards Department] and the OPI [Office of Police Integrity], and all these bodies, a lot of our time too is tied up with making sure everything is spot-on, where in the past you’ve probably had a bit of leeway there, [when the only] object was to get the offender caught. Now you’re scrutinised every step of the way, everything you do. *Urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 20 years with Victoria Police*

The sense of being perpetually accountable can lead to the perception that every new procedure or policy introduced merely opens up further avenues for potential discipline of personnel. This is evident in some of the reactions of participants in this research to family violence procedures already in place at Victoria Police. As one officer commented:

you take them to court and the magistrate, they tell the magistrate they don’t want an intervention order, and the magistrate goes, ‘Alright, no worries’. But then we get, we’re the first ones they criticise if something happens, and there’s no order in place. *Outer urban station, Snr Const. [CIU], 9 years with Victoria Police*

Compliance with policies and procedures, whether related to victims of crime or other matters, can therefore often be negatively motivated by a desire to avoid internal reprimand or complaints from members of the public. As one sergeant noted:

the thing you’ll find with some members, a lot of members understand the system, it’s not that they’re not doing the work or their job, they … probably just … don’t want to chase it. Like I said, with some of the victims who contact me to ask, ‘What happened with my statement?’, when I go and chase [it] up with the member, they’ve probably already interviewed the person, and a brief is halfway [done] … but you need to keep people updated, and let them know what’s going on. Members are so used to head down, bum up, and just onto the next one, I’ve got to get that paperwork done … But it’s the little things like that where they let themselves down. And sometimes it can result in complaints for a really hard-working member who’s done everything right, except that follow-up phone call. Do you know what I mean? And a two-minute phone call would have saved a lot of that. *Major regional station, Sgt [Family Violence], 7 years with Victoria Police*

This observation echoes the findings of Chan’s research, that young probationary constables feel that when charges are brought against police they are treated with undue severity, and that police are vulnerable to unfair disciplinary actions, even for unintentional mistakes (2003: 226). Moreover, the feeling of being ‘under the microscope’ and always accountable is accompanied by a sense that good police work is seldom recognised or acknowledged. The following comments reflect this perception:
I don’t think it’s as good as when you make a mistake. If you do the wrong thing it gets around a lot quicker, and more people tend to know about it, than when you do something good, and it’s just expected that, ‘Oh yeah, well done’. I feel ... personal[ly] that [it] makes me feel good ... that I’ve spent [time with someone] and they’ve appreciated it. *Outer urban station, Const. [Uniform], 2 years with Victoria Police*

We’ll get in trouble for the slightest little thing, it can be anything, but when there’s praise it sort of goes under the carpet. Definitely, that’s a major flaw .... But if someone you come across as a victim or member of the public says, ‘oh, the police weren’t very good’, then if they mention it to one of our bosses then we get in trouble ... it seems to be, you do something slightly wrong ... no matter how small it may be or whatever ... it can blow right up. *Urban station, Snr Const. [Crime Desk], 20 years with Victoria Police*

There is therefore a need to recognise and reward officers for their positive interactions with the public, rather than only responding when such interactions are problematic, with disciplinary action. It was apparent from the discussions, however, that current recording processes make this difficult to achieve. One sergeant noted how difficult it is to acknowledge gestures of public satisfaction, which often go unrecorded:

> When we go through their PDAs [Professional Development Awards] and we look at customer service, this, that, the other, you might if someone rang to thank you or someone gave you a card or whatever...we [might] put that on the PDA. But more often than not it’s pretty hard for us to measure it, as I said, they might get phone calls directly from the victim saying ‘thank you very much, that’s wonderful, you did a great job, thank you’. End of story: they know they’ve done a good job, we don’t. *Urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 20 years with Victoria Police*

Moreover, other senior officers observed that there are a considerable number of tasks that police carry out – including quite intensive work with victims of crime – that are difficult to acknowledge in statistical calculations of police performance. As the following comment from a senior officer suggested:

> I know members out in these areas, we’ve got single member stations who have dealings with everybody in their community, and if a member of their community is a victim, then they’ll have continuous contact with them, because they see people every day ... These things just aren’t recorded; the amount of time they spend with their communities and the victims ... We spend a lot more [time] than what these records are reflecting. *Regional station, Insp., 28 years with Victoria Police*

To briefly summarise the main points above, it emerged from the interviews that new policies and procedures are frequently implemented at, and therefore impact upon, the workplace at the station level where there is already considerable cynicism regarding innovations directed from the centre. Frequently this is due to the fact that any additional policies and procedures are seen only to increase paperwork and create novel means for management to control and discipline personnel. Additionally, participants reported that there is scant acknowledgement of good practice in a system that is seen as focused on compliance and box-ticking. This is unfortunate, as many officers (particularly those we might define as ‘victim-oriented’) do consider victims of crime to be an important part of police work. Nevertheless, policies that are poorly communicated to members in terms of operational value, and which become ‘one more thing we have to do’, are likely to invite begrudging compliance at best.
5.3.3 Policies and procedures: the Victims’ Charter and LEAP

As already mentioned, there have been a number of innovations within Victoria Police policy and procedure in relation to interactions with victims of crime. The Victims’ Charter places a number of obligations upon police in terms of respectful treatment of victims of crime and the ‘clear, timely and consistent’ (s. 7a) provision of information. It should be noted, however, that the Victims’ Charter is not legally binding. In common with similar charters elsewhere (see Booth & Carrington 2007) it is largely symbolic legislation that seeks to set guidelines for the treatment of victims in the criminal justice system. Victoria Police has developed particular strategies aimed at reducing and/or preventing youth victimisation (Child and Youth Strategy 2009–13) and family violence, sexual assault and child abuse (Living Free from Violence 2009–14). More broadly, however, Victoria Police introduced reporting processes to meet the requirements of the Charter whereby victims of crimes against the person can ask to be kept informed of the progress of their case. All victims of crime are presented with what is known as an ‘L1 Form’ at the time of reporting an incident. The L1 Form contains basic information for victims of crime, including a free-call number. Victoria Police policy also recommends that, at the time of reporting, victims of crime be given a copy of the Victims Guide – a booklet containing more detailed information than provided on the L1 form including information about services and the operation of the criminal justice system. Importantly, for those who are reporting crimes against the person, it also contains a tick box allowing victims to request that they be kept informed of the progress of their case. This hard-copy data is then sent internally to central administration, where it is recorded on the Victoria Police LEAP database. Individual officers and their supervisors then have access to a Victim Notification Page where the time, number and nature of contacts with the relevant victim can be entered. In addition, the system sends prompts via email to the responsible officer to make contact with the victim within a three-month timeframe. Should an arrest be made, and the victim has requested notification, the officer will then be responsible for informing the victim of the arrest and charge, any bail outcomes and the relevant court times, dates and case outcomes. In the following, we briefly discuss members’ attitudes towards and knowledge of the Victims’ Charter. We then consider how the LEAP procedure outlined above is perceived and how it operates in practice.

The first point to note is that very few officers explicitly mentioned the Victims’ Charter, even where it was clear that they were acquainted with its broad principles (respectful treatment and timely information). Admittedly, this may be a reflection of our research agenda – it was important that the research not be viewed as an evaluation of the Charter. Had the research been perceived in such a way it could have seriously compromised our efforts to map actual attitudes and practices. While very few officers explicitly mentioned the Charter, the responses of those who did are of interest. One officer remarked:

That whole Victims’ Charter thing that came in ... I will be completely frank with you, it’s a waste of time ... It’s another bloody thing we have to do and that we’re getting chased on. The theory behind it is really good and I understand why it’s there ... but I think most coppers are really good at identifying someone who does need to be more supported. Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 4 years with Victoria Police

This officer’s response is extremely telling. His primary objections to the introduction of Charter requirements were that it inflates bureaucracy, increases managerial control, and that police are already working according to the Charter’s principles. Nevertheless, while objecting to the manner in which it was introduced, this officer conceded that underpinning the Charter is a ‘really good’ theory. A more common attitude to the Victims’ Charter, however, was demonstrated by one of the sergeants:
I mean [the] Victims’ Charter is a good example. Many of us are aware of it but I’m not sure they’re aware of the nitty gritty. I’m not. I have to tell you I’m not because I’ve probably got a certain way of dealing with my victims ... I’m not sure the Charter has put any better practices in place for me to do my job. In some ways it’s a bit of a hindrance because some people don’t want to be notified. *Outer urban station, Snr Sgt [CIU], 18 years with Victoria Police*

Thus, as this sergeant observed, many police are aware that the Victims’ Charter was implemented and have some understanding of its implications for police practice. Understanding of the details, however, was often vague, and the contents of the Charter rarely featured in the interviews. Officers were far more eager to discuss the reporting system: the combination of the L1 Form and the electronic LEAP Victim Notification System. Some officers involved in areas where victims are already an integral part of their duties expressed their resentment about the system, as it was seen to demonstrate a lack of trust from senior management that officers could do what they were already doing prior to the system’s introduction. In their study of policing in Canada, Ericson and Haggerty noted that a new family violence form was resisted by officers for two reasons: first, that it was seen to increase workloads, and second, that it was viewed as ‘an externally driven surveillance technology based on an outlook of distrust’ (1997: 386). Similar sentiments were evident in the present study. One detective stated that the system implies that ‘we can’t be trusted to keep the victim updated off our own skills and management’ (Urban, Snr Const. [CIU], 5 years with Victoria Police). Other experienced officers also thought the system compelled them to record what they already did, but did not necessarily result in better service for victims, as revealed in the following comment:

> So it’s changed in that way in that we actually record that we’ve contacted a victim. Whereas years ago we would have continual contact with some people but there was no record of it. *Regional station, Insp., 28 years with Victoria Police*

Nevertheless, a number of sergeants managing Uniform general duties officers conceded that responses to victims of crime required improvement, and that some system of monitoring that this was done effectively was necessary:

> I suppose you’ve got to take care of your victim as much as you can.... right from the outset and I think... we fail in this miserably at times. *Outer urban station, Snr Sgt [Management], 37 years with Victoria Police*

> But now because you’ve got more of a set of guidelines to deal with the victims, certain things you just have to do, so you’re forced to do it. Whereas prior to that, no I think we probably didn’t treat victims, and probably because we didn’t have the time. But now we are forced to do it, and it’s a good thing and it’s improved. *Outer urban station, Snr Const. [CIU], 26 years with Victoria Police*

Other officers were generally supportive of systems that compel officers to follow up with victims of crime, expressing the opinion that increases in other policing tasks meant that this aspect of police work often slipped in priority:

> There’s no time for that anymore. So I think we did need to bring something in via computer that would remind us to do certain things, because otherwise it was just getting lost. *Outer urban station, L. Snr Const. [Uniform], 21 years with Victoria Police*
An additional complaint aired was that the current information technology and interface of the system was too complicated, and that officers were frequently unsure of how to use the system. This issue surfaced in relation to the means by which information from the courts is fed into the Victim Notification System. This is a significant problem, as the interface between court and police data is not working effectively. Thus, officers who would like to keep victims of crime informed of court dates and outcomes are faced with additional work in tracking down the relevant information, which should be readily accessible via the Victim Notification Page. One officer made the following comment in relation to this:

The system the way it is with injury reports, guys [i.e. police informants] aren’t going to court. We’re not getting the feedback from courts. They’re not following up the results from court. A lot of the time you only find out what’s happened when the victim rings us up to find out what happened so we ... go back and check. *Outer urban station, Snr Sgt [Management]*.

The communication of prosecution outcomes to informants (i.e. the police informant who prepares the brief) was consistently identified in the interviews as an area in which there has been a breakdown in process. For individual officers, particularly Uniform officers, there is no simple system that allows them to easily update the final result and for this result to be communicated to victims. Many officers noted that, given the time lapse between preparing a case and its resolution in court, they rarely remember to check the result, which is exacerbated by the fact that they are personally often not interested in the outcome. The majority of participants emphasised that as crimes are always being reported and their work, especially for Uniform officers, is predominantly reactive, they rarely have time to consider past cases once the brief has been finalised. In addition, many participants expressed a concern that the Victims Notification process effectively requires them to update victims on court processes, which many felt was unrealistic and unworkable. The main reasons cited for resisting this requirement included the time it can take for cases to be resolved, the multiple court hearings that do not produce outcomes of significant interest to victims (such as adjudications and various delays), and the absence of a straightforward and efficient way to access information on court outcomes. Studies in the US have similarly found that the barriers between investigation and prosecution tend to result in communication barriers between police and courts (see Ready et al. 2002). We seek to address this problem through the final recommendations of this report.

If there is a flawed exchange of relevant information between the courts and police, it was also noted that the system itself is not user-friendly, and officers at times lack the expertise to use it effectively. One sergeant expressed frustration that LEAP was poorly understood by the officers he supervised, and that training had not been satisfactory:

They need a training environment... to see what you can actually do with it. They don’t even know how to look up their active LEAP reports, let alone look at the victim notification things... they don’t [even] know where to find that. *Regional station, Sgt [Uniform], 20 years with Victoria Police*

The perception that there is a technical skills deficit in relation to operating the system was echoed by another senior management officer:

Well, our handling of victims is poor ... It’s hard to manage it properly ... there’s [a] system in place ... but it’s not very effective. The main part of it is that people haven’t been shown how to use it properly and all it is, is ticking a box on initial reports and going back into a system and making an entry to say you notified the victim ... It’s too wide a scope. The workload the guys are under, particularly in this office here, a busy CIB office, it makes it difficult to maintain constant...
contact with victims to let them know what’s going on. Outer urban station, Snr Sgt [Management].

In discussions of the value of the LEAP Victim Notification System, the heavy workloads of personnel, combined with a lack of resources, resurfaced as a key theme across the interviews. However, an important caveat here is that half of our interview participants voiced no particular opinion about the LEAP system, other than to acknowledge its existence and provide a matter-of-fact account of how it operated. It was seen as taking time, but not necessarily more time than is reasonable. Nevertheless, a significant number of participants were resistant to the process itself and/or its current operating system, and front-line supervisors and officers alike conceded that the system is resisted and in some cases resented by officers.

It was evident in the interviews that the initial use of the L1 Form is often subverted as it is the entry point for victims onto the system and the formal record that victims would like follow-up, which necessarily results in an increase in workload. Officers across Victoria admitted with striking candour the decision they had made or were aware others were making to simply tick ‘no’ on the question of victim follow-up. One sergeant considered how and why this occurs:

things are probably getting ticked off at the very beginning, saying the victim doesn’t want to be notified and then they [the individual officers] don’t have to do anything .... I’ve got no doubt that happens and then they don’t have to worry about notifying them because as soon as you say ‘yes’ then you have to go through all those other, every single stage .... I wouldn’t say it’s common practice ... but it probably is happening for sure. Regional station, Sgt [Uniform]

Indeed, while victims can opt out of receiving further notification, for some officers simply asking victims whether they would like updates creates the possibility of a positive response, which they effectively do not want as they see further notification as a workload burden. It was also acknowledged that these system requirements can be avoided by recording that the victim wants no further contact, without actually asking the victims themselves. These findings echo US research from 2008, in which Davis and Mulford’s (2008) examination of police compliance with legislated victim notification requirements found high rates of noncompliance. Indeed, the issue of noncompliance was raised by participants in our research, most often in relation to the decision to select ‘no further contact’ on the L1 Form to avoid follow-up requirements:

I don’t think I’ve ever ticked ‘yes’. I tick ‘no’ all the time ... because you’re ... dealing with it anyway and you are going to be talking to them, you are going to be photographing and you are going to be telephoning, or they will be ringing you ... Some people are really good at it [updating LEAP and pursuing victim notification but] ... to be honest I’m not, and I’ll often have in the day book, I might say I’ve spoken to such and such and it probably never goes on LEAP ... [It’s because, for example] in the watch house this morning, I could go on and do it but then we’ve had 10 prisoners, we’ve had eight that have headed off and then you’ve got the counter enquiries, you’ve got everything else that is going on. I’ve opened LEAP ... and that’s it. I won’t even get close to [filling it out]. So that’s a normal morning in the watch house. You go out on the road and by the time you get flogged to death out there ... you just tend to let it go. Major regional station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 6 years with Victoria Police

It is worth noting, however, that selecting ‘no’ to the question of follow-up on the L1 Form did not translate into those officers doing nothing further for victims. More often this was motivated by a desire to minimise ‘paperwork’ and administrative tasks related to the provision of ongoing notification. In
some cases it was reported that police preferred to work at their own pace, rather than facing systematised reminders, pressure from supervisors and the ensuing time pressures.

Intertwined with the perception that the L1 Form process generated additional, unnecessary time burdens was resistance to the process on the grounds that it removes police discretion and constitutes a one-size-fits-all approach that makes assumptions about what victims want. Thus, some police expressed suspicion that the system might encourage victims of offences deemed minor to request follow-up calls, as the following officer suggested:

[I]f someone has their number plate stolen from their car you’re not going to have an ongoing relationship with that person, you ... offer them advice on the day, you give them the appropriate paperwork but they’re not expecting us to call them a week later saying, ‘How are you coping with your number plates being stolen?’. **Urban station, Sgt [CIU], 9 years with Victoria Police**

However, the above comment misrepresents the process, which only currently applies to crimes against the person and would not therefore include the theft described. Nevertheless, it does convey a deeper anxiety that officers may be required to spend their shifts making endless follow-up calls on cases.

A final frustration voiced by a number of participants was that the current provisions are based on broad assumptions about what victims want, when it was considered that many victims prefer limited interaction with police. Thus, the system was resented for removing front-line discretion in this regard and ignoring the working knowledge and assessments made in individual cases. As such, the Victim Notification System was viewed as unreflective of the limited needs of many victims of crime, particularly those encountered in routine patrols by Uniform officers:

I can probably count on one hand the amount of victims I’ve had that have actually requested to be kept updated. They’re the minority in my experience anyway. Once they’ve made their complaint, like I said, they’re happy. Police know about it, yeah it’s going to go to court, he’s been charged. That’s all, they’re happy. That’s all they want to know. **Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 4 years with Victoria Police**

I think they just want to know what the outcome of their case is. Most of them are not concerned about what’s going on along the way, they make a report and they want to hear back afterwards and find out what the outcome was. **Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 3 years with Victoria Police**

Ideally, victims of crime are also provided with the **Victims Guide**, a booklet that provides reasonably extensive information on the criminal justice system and relevant support services. It should be noted that this is a recommended rather than mandated procedure, so there is considerable variation in the distribution of booklets to victims of crime. Nevertheless, some officers reported that having access to the booklet saves time as it supplies much information that would otherwise need to be provided directly by the investigating officer:

I tend to just give out the booklet as a matter of course. If I don’t have one on me at the time I’ll send it out, or if they live close I’ll go and see them and hand-deliver it to them, but I just tend to give them that. My personal view is [that] it’s got more information in it. And I find that if you give them that, if they read through it, a lot of the questions that they would normally ring you about, and not that I’m trying to get rid of them, but a lot of the questions that they may have
about what the process is and what’s going to happen from there is pretty much explained in the booklet. So it saves time for me if I’ve got a large number of outstanding matters, that I don’t have to be ringing people constantly, or trying to get in touch with them constantly to answer their questions. **Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 6 years with Victoria Police**

However, some front-line supervisors reported having difficulties in getting officers to carry and distribute the booklets, and also that members of the public did not always want them or understand what they were:

[Y]ou can give them a victim booklet ... or reduce it down to a little card that you could give them or whatever, but, one, you have to get the members to give it to them, and, two, people go, ‘What’s this?’, and they throw it away type of thing. So how do you get that across to the members to give that information out because, let’s face it, we don’t carry the books around in the car with us, they’re here at the station. So it’s really only if they come in for a statement you give them the book, following it up you give them the book, but it’s sort of difficult to do. **Regional station, Sgt [Uniform], 20 years with Victoria Police**

Others viewed the provision of the booklet as impractical, and this was often aligned with an attitude that prioritises criminal investigation:

There’s this little fancy booklet, unrealistic, never happens, unless they come into the station and make a witness statement. I don’t carry around a box full of these bloody things to hand out because I’m usually looking for a crook, taking photos, getting crime scene down there, doing all this practical stuff. **Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 5 years with Victoria Police**

The booklet was viewed favourably by the participants overall, although it was often kept within stations rather than carried in divisional vans, for which there is a practical reason. It was reported that there is already a substantial amount of equipment kept within divisional vans, and the size of the current booklet often makes it difficult to find sufficient space to store copies. Developing smaller information cards that contain an abridged version of the information provided in the booklet, for distribution at crime scenes, could alleviate this problem.

It is now worth briefly summarising some of the key points made in this subsection. The Victims’ Charter is not in the main acknowledged as a guiding document for Victoria Police procedure at present. There is some resistance towards the Charter among police officers, but this is not widespread. The knowledge voiced about the specific Charter requirements tended to be vague. However, in reality this is not a significant issue as front-line officers are aware of the internal policies and procedures that are intended to fulfil Charter obligations. Reactions to these policies and procedures are mixed. Half of the participants interviewed had no particular opinion and accepted the policies and procedures, albeit sometimes begrudgingly, as simply ‘one more thing that needs to be done’. Nevertheless, there is significant cynicism in relation to the process, which was viewed by some as communicating distrust in the capacity of front-line police to deliver appropriate services, and as extending managerial control and the potential for discipline and reprimand. There are also pockets of active resistance to the L1 Form, particularly where it is seen as generating excess paperwork and increasing workload. The extent of this resistance is probably impossible to measure, as it tends to occur in the low-visibility context of patrol. Even where officers expressed their support for the underlying aims of the current process, the information technology was viewed as cumbersome and not user-friendly. Moreover, our research identified serious problems in relation to the information flow between courts and police recorded on the system. This can make informing victims of the progress of their case unnecessarily complicated and labour-intensive for
officers. The provision of the Victims Guide to victims is generally supported by police members, at least in theory; but they are most often kept at stations, they are reported to be inconsistently distributed and their current size prevents them from being carried in divisional vans due to the limited space available.

5.4 Training

Discussing the problematic interaction between police and victims of crime, the late Brian Williams suggested that ‘one of the keys to changing police attitudes to victims would seem likely to lie in staff training’ (1999: 105). In this vein, we found it important to broach this issue during interviews, particularly as ‘training’ is often advanced as the solution to practices identified as problematic within police organisations. We therefore examine perceptions of three forms of training currently in operation at Victoria Police: the first is the training provided within the Police Academy during the first five months; the second is the on-the-job learning experience of probationary constables placed with mentors; and the third is the online training packages offered across Victoria Police in relation to victims of crime, and the electronic means by which new policies and procedures are communicated to front-line officers.

5.4.1 The Academy

Participants were asked about their training at the Police Academy – specifically what it involved, how much of it they remembered and whether they considered it useful. These questions pertained to training generally and to specific training relating to victims. As with students generally, the level of recall varied. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a number of probationary constables interviewed had fairly clear recollections of the training and were generally positive about the content:

There definitely were avenues and different sorts of modules that were made up for victims of crime. I’ve got to say it wasn’t touched on heavily, just because there is so much procedure and policy that you’ve got to learn in such a short timeframe, but they do definitely make sure they touch base on just how to deal with them and always ensure that … if [possible] … one member is speaking to the victim [while another] member is speaking to the offender and you try and make sure that there is always the appropriate level of care for both. Urban station, Prob. Const. [Uniform], 5 months with Victoria Police

They do … a session on it, there is a lecture on it … and it was actually quite good. Yeah they tell you how to deal with it. But [in reality] every victim is different and it’s hard to gauge what it is that they need from us. Urban station, Prob. Const. [Uniform], 6 months with Victoria Police

Officers who had passed through the Academy only a few years previously remembered basic information imparted in their training, however most commonly the details they recalled we less specific, for example:

There was a bit of training in relation to [victims]… I think the Victim’s Charter Guide was going to be introduced. They were telling us it would be introduced in the next couple of years or so, so there was a bit of training from… what I remember. Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 3 years with Victoria Police

Both in relation to victims and more generally, recollection and mobilisation of knowledge from Academy training was seen to be impeded in part by the hectic pace of the Academy schedule, including the number of topics covered, and the steep learning curve that occurs once police are in the community. As one officer recollected:
Look, you’re getting fed a lot of information all at once when you’re at the Academy so it’s sort of you learn so much and then [you’re] just thrown into the deep end, bang you’re a policeman now. I probably had a small understanding of what was required. Until you come out and you’re actually dealing with it every day, then you sort of familiarise yourself with what’s going on. Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 3 years with Victoria Police

Upon departure from the Police Academy memories of much of the information imparted tend to fade quickly:

I can’t remember anything, which would lead me to think that very little is taught in relation to dealing with victims. I think from memory the only sort of training they gave you in relation to victims was death messages and dealing with getting death messages to family members. Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 6 years with Victoria Police

The performance of ‘death knocks’ referred to above (informing a member of the public that their family member has died) was frequently described as a confronting aspect of the police role for which it was difficult, if not impossible, to prepare. At the same time, some officers considered that the management of trauma and grief generally (i.e. managing victim, witness, colleagues and personal emotional responses) should be a more significant aspect of the Academy Training curriculum, with one officer observing:

I wasn’t well enough trained to provide advice... we didn’t have a... enough knowledge of the process of grief. Remote station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 24 years with Victoria Police

Generally officers considered that their training was sufficient, but this usually sat beside the opinion that the most useful learning occurred in the field rather than the Academy (which resonates with other research, cf Chan 2003), as this officer’s explanation of the importance of mentors when learning how to do ‘death knocks’ demonstrates:

Nothing will prepare you for telling someone that their loved one has passed away, especially when it’s unexpected, [it’s] very emotional. But as for how much they can teach in the Academy, I reckon it is sufficient [what they teach] because you only learn so much in a classroom, and that’s where a good mentor comes into it. Regional station, Const. [Uniform], four years with Victoria Police

This separation between the ‘theory’ of the Academy training and the ‘real’ learning that takes place on the job is critical, as previous research has found that positive attitudes inculcated in the Academy can soon be undone once recruits enter the workplace and are exposed to broader influences within the organisational culture (Haarr 2001; Chan 2003). It is therefore important to turn to the question of on-the-job training.

5.4.2 On-the-job training

The training and socialisation of police officers that occurs when they enter the field is of crucial importance, and is a subject frequently explored by police researchers. Chan’s study, for example, identified that new recruits began their career with the assumption that police work is about crime-fighting, and while this was briefly challenged at the Academy, it was not long before they ‘started to repeat the mantra’ that such training was “‘warm and fuzzy stuff’ and quite irrelevant to real policing’ (2003: 315). Examining police training in community policing and problem-solving policing in the US, Haarr (2001) also found that, while recruits left their training feeling enthusiastic and positive, this
attitude sharply dissipated after 16 months in the field among mentors who were cynical about the value of new policing theories. It would be naïve to imagine that such a process does not also occur within Victoria Police in relation to ‘victim-oriented’ operational styles advocated during training. The words of one female senior sergeant encapsulate how this can operate:

So you go through the Academy and you learn all this good stuff and then you come out here and work with a senior constable who’s burnt out, thinks the job has gone, he’s really nailed, there’s nothing in it for him. So you’re working with a whole range of different – you don’t get to pick who you work with – so some of it might rub off on you, especially if you’re trying to be mentored by them, trying to pick up what works and what doesn’t, and sometimes you get called a ‘Care Bear’ if you get too overindulgent in trying to help people, and I think that masculinity has got something to do with it too. Men seem to think it’s weak to spend five minutes talking to someone that you’ve dealt with a few times that keeps on being drunk. They tend to think it’s weak to show that you think that what they’ve done is understandable to the point where they had a reason. They seem to think [about] it like that. Regional station, Snr Sgt [Uniform], 25 years with Victoria Police

This comment raises important questions about gender and policing that are outside the remit of this report. It also points to the crucial role of mentoring in establishing and crafting police operational styles and priorities. While the example given above reflects a negative view of their impact, mentoring and on-the-job training could just as easily be powerfully reinforcing of the positive attitudes communicated in Academy training. As another senior constable noted:

the majority of it is just on-the-job training; the quality of your training is going to come down to the quality of the people you work with, and the care factor of the people you work with, and that varies from station to station. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Crime Desk], 18 years with Victoria Police

The positive potential of on-the-job training is dependent on certain issues related to police operational styles be addressed first, which we discuss further in Section 5.5.

5.4.3 Online training and communication

In a large, dispersed police organisation such as Victoria Police the use of information technology can facilitate information delivery about new policies and procedures. Increasingly, it is also being used to distribute online training packages designed to provide workplace-friendly education without disrupting station workforces. While this is to some extent inevitable in the contemporary context, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this mode of delivery and communication. We draw attention to this in particular because the limitation of online training and communication was the subject of much discussion during the interviews.

Online training and information delivery occurs within a workplace that is heavily reliant upon electronic communication, which impacts the effectiveness of this medium. Email was perceived by an overwhelming majority of officers to be a burden, and training delivered via online was most often viewed as another piece of unwanted information and/or imposing greater demands on time for desk-based work which did not fit into the schedules of Uniform officers:

We get so many emails anyway, and all our work is computer-related now, so you’re just in front of it all the time. If you can’t get in front of a computer, you’re stuck, you can’t do anything, you
can’t catch up on anything. You go away for six days, you come back and there’s like 117 emails. You just want to get off the computer, so it’s not the best way to get our attention via another program on the computer. Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 1 year with Victoria Police

The sense that email communications are creating additional tasks and distracting from proactive police work was connected to the frequently expressed cynicism about the outcomes and validity of online training.

Online training was consistently reported to be a limited tool for learning. Participants frequently indicated that online training programs are hurdle requirements, and are therefore treated as a task rather than an important tool for enhancing police practice (through knowledge and awareness). It is noteworthy that these processes are generally recognised as ‘hurdles’, only completed because they are requirements, and that their value as an effective tool for learning is questionable:

I know it’s cost-effective, saves losing a member for the day, but I don’t think you learn as well. Urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 20 years with Victoria Police

It’s probably a bit of a waste of time, that. In reality you do what you’ve got to do to pass, not what you’ve got to do. Outer urban station, Const. [Uniform], 1 year with Victoria Police

Yeah, you’ve just got to try and skim through it as quick as you can and get the tick, yeah, I’ve done the course. Realistically that’s often how people approach it on the whole. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Crime Desk], 1 year with Victoria Police

I think it’s a woeful way of training. I can see it’s a cost-effective way of training and I can’t see any other reason for it – there is no way we will have as good a service as a hands-on training package, there’s no way. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Crime Desk], 15 years with Victoria Police

You roll your eyes back in your head, after five minutes of this you go, ‘right, see you later, you’ve all been trained’. We’ve all signed the form, you’ve all signed your attendance, you’ve been trained – [then later they ask] ‘why didn’t you do it? You’ve been trained’. Disgraceful. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [CIU]

Look, VicPol are notoriously poor with their training in that something new comes in and we’ll get an email ... We’ll get an email to say, well, this is starting tomorrow, read it. They’ll give you a link to the new legislation on the new website. Have a read of this, tomorrow it starts and you need to know about it. Outer urban station, Snr. Sgt. [Management]

Despite the overwhelming cynicism about online training, some officers spoke favourably about this method of delivery. However, advantages were most commonly spoken of in terms of flexibility and ease of completion rather than learning outcomes:

Online training is alright because it’s easy, you can just do it in your own time and all that, but it’s probably with the online training packages and stuff, sometimes you can be prone to cheat with them, you know, if you haven’t got the time and you sit with someone who’s already done it and tick tick tick [or] ... someone passes the sheet around, so it’s good and bad. Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 2 years with Victoria Police
Regardless of the flexibility of online training packages, the time allocated for the completion of such packages was seen as inadequate, and combined with the general perception that online training was not of importance in relation to real police work, shortcuts are utilised. One officer commented:

That’s why those cheat sheets go around, because sometimes you’ll be under the pump so much and you can sit there [at the computer] and boom, boom, boom, it’s done. Where... if you’ve got it on paper [you can take more time and take it in so], if you’ve got five minutes you might read a page today, you might read a page tomorrow. Regional station, L. Snr Const. [Uniform], 30 years with Victoria Police

Another supervising officer suggested that the fact that such training is not allocated a specific day or time, as face-to-face training requires, means that online training is simply positioned within normal duties which increases the workload and time pressures on supervisors and front-line officers alike. As he explains, these training conditions rarely enable or encourage significant learning outcomes:

And some members, the only time they might get to sit down and read it is four am on a night shift ‘cause it’s the quiet moment, it’s four ‘til five, and they’re half asleep anyway, but [they think] ‘oh thank god I got that done’ ... [but] they’re not taking it in. That’s no fault of the members, but we haven’t made the effort to train them properly. So then we’re riding them, and you’re going, ‘you haven’t done this, you’re not doing this’, [and their response is,] ‘Look I’m sorry, I did the training a year ago, I haven’t discussed it with anyone since ... I didn’t really get it, I just did what I had to do to pass’. Regional station, Sgt [Family Violence], 7 years with Victoria Police

Cynicism in relation to the value of online training is present across front-line and supervisory personnel. Indeed, one constable claimed that in some cases supervising officers authored the ‘cheat sheet’:

At the station it’s just something that one person does, normally a sergeant, and they print out their answers and they hand their answers around to everybody else just because it’s something that is compulsory. [With] online training I don’t even read the question. I just go, ‘okay, that’s B’ and move on to the next thing. Outer urban station, Const. [Uniform], 2 years with Victoria Police

Circumventing the process by finding someone else who had the answers or developing a ‘cheat sheet’ for use within the station was recognised by senior and junior staff alike as a necessity to enable the efficient and timely completion of such training. These practices also reflect the dominant view that online training is of limited value, as one sergeant observed:

Online training, I’m not a big fan of it. If it’s a compulsory thing that I have to do I’ll do it, but online stuff, online surveys, if I don’t have to do it I won’t do it ... but if you have to do it, again you’ll find someone who has done it and has all the right answers and just go through it that way. Outer urban station, Sgt [Crime Desk], 20 years with Victoria Police

It was rare for participants to identify online training as a process that assisted in updating their skills or knowledge. Indeed, while not all supervisors disregarded the value of online training packages, many believed that the learning outcomes were limited; and while they acknowledged that officers often shared their work, this was not a high-priority concern:

My view is that it’s not sufficient ... anything online where you have to do it, it’s a case of I just ... have to get it over and done with and I don’t really care ... and that’s the sort of mentality that a lot of people have. I would guess the people that have got a genuine interest in what they’re
doing with the online package might be 5 per cent of people, or 10 per cent of people. I can even tell the new members that haven’t done it and have got other members to do it for them, just to get it over and done with. I can vouch for that. Urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 20 years with Victoria Police

The point here is not to expose poor practice or to suggest that tighter regulation in regards to online training be implemented. Rather, our aim is to highlight that online training is widely disparaged by members, and easily avoided and has limited practical learning outcomes. If the intention is to make officers aware that certain policies and procedures exist then it may, to a greater or lesser extent, achieve this modest aim. However, in terms of encouraging good practice in the field, the outcomes appear to be negligible. Some supervising officers astutely observed that the outcomes of online training could only provide a baseline knowledge that then needs to be supplemented with further learning:

It might be effective time-wise, for the fact that they don’t have to drag us out and put us in the classroom somewhere and take out that time, they can just say you have to do it, so find five minutes somewhere or whatever. So it might be effective from that point of view, but is it effective learning? I’m not sure, because it’d need to be reinforced perhaps with follow-up. Outer urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 12 years with Victoria Police

Many officers identified classroom-based, face-to-face training as their preferred alternative, but they often also recognised that implementing this model of training would generate an increased workload pressure on stations and that this would be too great a compromise:

I think online training, if they allocate your time, they should do it like a meeting type thing. [They should say,] ‘okay, we’ve got training for the Victims’ Charter, we all want you to do this’, and have someone come out and do it and [we] … do it together, get it all done in one hit, instead of having to get it sent on the email and do all this and do all that, because you don’t get time to read it properly. Regional station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 8 years with Victoria Police

Training days are great but they sap off a lot of resources so you’ve got to look at the alternatives, [but] the online training is not working. Some people will do it but the majority will work the system out and not do it. The information, is it retained? Direct training, having a facilitator and – is that better? Do people retain it better than just reading it online? Because you don’t have any feeling or compassion when you read it online, when somebody who is passionate about what they believe in or what they feel or what they’re training in is going to pass that on to the people that they’re training. Outer urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 34 years with Victoria Police

In summary, our findings revealed that online training is limited in what it can deliver within the current context. It is flexible and can deliver basic information, yet there is widespread dissatisfaction among police that time is not appropriately allocated, and this frustration is felt by front-line officers and their supervisors. This poses a dilemma for an organisation as vast and disparate as Victoria Police. Obviously, delivering face-to-face, classroom-based instruction on each new policy and procedure would be untenable in terms of both time and resources. Moreover, it would require careful preparation of curriculum that engaged officers. One officer preferred online learning because ‘you don’t have to sit down and listen to some bloke tell his war stories. They’re so boring’ (Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 15 years with Victoria Police). This view indicates that officers’ experiences of face-to-face training have not always been exemplary. While online training is limited it will, no doubt, for logistical reasons continue to form one element of training. However, its limitations must be recognised, and it should not be considered a stand-alone solution for police training and further education.
5.5 Front-line supervision

There have been surprisingly few studies of the role of sergeants (and in Victoria, senior sergeants) within police organisations. In the early 1980s, police scholar John Van Maanen, in his influential study of US police sergeants entitled The Boss, noted that:

Sergeants have rarely been the explicit target of police studies. When they have been studied, it has usually been incidental to the examination of a particular police function… The few studies concerned with general police administration have typically lumped sergeants into the lower order of police agencies and have concentrated instead on the management activities and perspectives of high departmental officials. (1983: 276)

Van Maanen’s (1983) comments are, regrettably, equally applicable today. However, the importance of the sergeant as front-line supervisor has recently been recognised in the UK, where Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) commissioned a report examining this crucial role (HMIC 2008).

The significance of this research background for the present report is that, while our research is not an ethnographic study, as researchers we visited numerous stations throughout the state and were struck by the importance of sergeants as front-line supervisors in shaping the character and culture of particular stations. Front-line supervisors are a vital conduit through which operational styles, station agendas and organisational priorities are communicated to other front-line personnel. A police officer’s story is presented below, to illustrate the potential negative impact of the role played by supervisors; yet in sharing this story we remain mindful that there is equal potential for such roles to be positive. It is a story related by a young constable who went to see a distressed woman whose fiancé had recently committed suicide. The officers were there to take a statement to be presented to the Coroners Court:

A guy … hung himself in his bathroom and the fiancé came home, and they were having their engagement party in two weeks time and all the invites were on the table. She actually came home and found him and he’d only been diagnosed with depression three months earlier. Before that everything was hunky dory … he had a good job, she had a good job, both in their mid 30s and he just, it just hit him and he hung himself, within three months of being diagnosed and … I actually kept in touch with her and her mother [after the incident]…. [W]hen I had to take her statement it was months later, I went to her mother’s house and met her there … because she moved out of the other [house], understandably, and it took me three hours… I think it was seven written pages but in that three hours doing [the] seven pages… she was crying the whole time and we had to stop, start, stop, start, [and I kept asking] ‘are you okay?’ [But] she wanted to do the statement … [so] it took three hours, a lot longer than I normally take, but it was really emotional, her and her mum were just wrecks and we did what we had to do, it was for the Coroners Court. I got back to work, and the sergeant said, ‘Why the hell would you take three hours [to do that]?’. I told him, but [he said], ‘you shouldn’t have [taken so long]’. I got in trouble for that. [I]t really made me so angry… that I could be actually criticised for taking three hours to take a statement and [even when] I explained that she was crying the whole time [he said], ‘nuh, not good enough, you should have sped it up a bit’. Urban station, Snr Const. [Crime Desk], 20 years with Victoria Police

The front-line supervisor in this incident was supplying an abrupt lesson that discouraged a compassionate officer who clearly possessed the ‘bedside manner’ that to a great extent enhances public perceptions of policing. Fortunately, however, this example is not typical of the attitudes of front-line supervisors observed or reported in our research. As the interview excerpts with sergeants and senior
sergeants presented in this section reveal, many conceded that service to victims of crime is currently not what it could be, and they were interested in how this might be improved. Their engagement with this research, and their assistance in many of our visits, attests to that good will. It is worth considering, therefore, whether training would not be better directed at this influential level within the police structure – that is, to sergeants and supervisory-level personnel. One front-line officer, for example, suggested that even the much derided online training might make more sense ‘if you had someone there like a sergeant or senior sergeant at the station who can stress the importance of it and the effect of not complying with it’ (Urban station, Snr Const. [CIU], 10 years with Victoria Police). However, it is not only in compliance but also in the reshaping of operational styles away from a purely crime-fighting orientation that front-line supervisors can potentially stimulate change.

5.6 Summary

This section has examined police perceptions of their role, and of the practices, policies and procedures that impact police–victim encounters. The key findings highlighted in this section are as follows:

1. Many officers find it difficult to define the exact police role and obligation towards victims of crime. This understanding also varies from officer to officer, dependent on both geographic and organisational location.

2. Police attitudes towards, and prioritisation of, victims of crime are intrinsically intertwined with police operational styles.

3. Police attitudes are also mediated by geographic and organisational location.

4. In general, officers who feel connected to the communities they serve tend to place a higher value on dealings with victims of crime.

5. Police frequently cited time and resource constraints as the major factors prohibiting more effective interactions with victims of crime. This may have some validity at certain times and at particularly hard-pressed stations. However, these claims often reveal equally that dealing with victims constitutes a low priority.

6. The rotation of shiftwork causes significant issues in maintaining continuity of contact with victims of crime. Shiftwork and leave arrangements can create a ‘backlog’ of victim updates, and can result in victims calling the station seeking information that is inaccessible when officers are not on duty.

7. The introduction of any new policy or procedure is interpreted by many front-line officers as just ‘another bloody thing to do’. This partially reflects poor communication within the organisation where the purpose of the innovation is not adequately transmitted to the front-line staff.

8. New policies and procedures (inclusive of those directly relating to Victim Notification) are resented by a significant minority of police. Various reasons were identified for such resentment: a belief that new policies and procedures open up new avenues for discipline and reprimand on the part of management; a belief that new policies and procedures open new avenues for complaint to the public, which may lead to reprimand; and a belief that new policies and procedures increase paperwork.

9. Front-line officers expressed a feeling that statistical and electronic records of their work were primarily kept for punitive reasons, and did not facilitate recognition of good practice in the field. There is a problem that much good practice goes unacknowledged, while any failure on the part of police to follow procedures is quickly noted.
10. Knowledge of the Victims’ Charter is patchy, but knowledge of the L1–LEAP Victim Notification procedure, the system intended to meet the Charter’s requirements, is near universal.

11. While half of the officers interviewed had no particular opinion about the current reporting requirements, the other half had complaints about the system. These complaints included: the feeling that the requirements evidenced a distrust of officers’ capacity on the part of management, the feeling that the system increases workload and does not deliver anything more to victims of crime, the opinion that the interface is clumsy and difficult to operate, and the view that officers are poorly trained in its operation.

12. There is noncompliance with the current procedure, although, as this generally occurs at the patrol stage with the L1 Form, it is virtually impossible to measure the extent of this.

13. There are significant problems with the communication between the electronic systems of the courts and the LEAP Victim Notification System. Bail hearings, court dates and outcomes are often not registered on the system, requiring that officers must manually search for information which should be easily accessible electronically.

14. **Victims Guide** booklets are, in general, well regarded, although they are primarily distributed from front desks rather than at the incident, because they are too large to be carried in divisional vans.

15. On-the-job training may quickly unravel the positive gains of the Academy if mentors consider victims of crime to be a low priority and instead encourage a ‘crime-fighting’ orientation.

16. There is deep cynicism among police members regarding the value of online training. However, it could retain a valuable place in such a large and complex organisation, if only for the provision of basic information.

17. Front-line supervisors have an important role to play in cultivating awareness of policies and procedures and in contextualising them within broader policing goals.

5.7 **Recommendations**

A number of practical recommendations follow from the findings presented in this section:

1. **Providing positive feedback to front-line personnel**

   It is important to create channels through which positive feedback for good practice in relation to police engagement with victims of crime is both recorded and acknowledged. It should therefore be possible for officers to record on the system positive feedback received informally. Letters or emails that communicate positive appraisal should also be recorded and acknowledged in individual officers’ PDAs, as sometimes occurs now. It would also be worth providing a victims of crime feedback page or hotline (or both) where individual victims of crime could report on their experiences of contact with police. For various reasons, there will always be some victims of crime whose expectations of policing are not met (see Section 6), and who would use such forums as a channel of complaint. Nevertheless, it would also be likely to encourage positive feedback from victims of crime that could then be acknowledged within the organisation and passed on to individual officers.

2. **LEAP database Victim Notification review and training**

   Victoria Police should review the current Victim Notification Page, which was widely reported to be cumbersome. A crucial part of any such review would involve liaison with the courts to...
develop an effective means of data exchange between the two organisations that would facilitate automatic and timely flow of information from the courts in relation to specific cases. It is also evident that there are deficits in technical knowledge among police in regards to the Victim Notification Page. While a user manual and other support mechanisms have been developed, the communication of their availability and the extent to which they assist users requires review, with a view to developing targeted responses to knowledge deficits. The development of an in-house training program that is tailored to the needs of individual stations, and can be managed through an easy-to-use booking system, may be one potential initiative in this area.

3. Victim support information

While police identified the Victims Guide booklet as the comprehensive victim information package, they also revealed that it is distributed to victims on an arbitrary basis. In part, this reflected the low priority placed on remembering to refill stocks of the booklet as well as officers’ frustration with the booklet’s size and the space it occupies in divisional vans. This points to the need to develop alternatives to the Victims Guide and/or to conduct a review of the information contained in the L1 Form, to ensure that adequate information is provided without increasing police workloads or the volume of material carried in vehicles and distributed at the scene of incidents.

4. Supplementing online training

Online training is likely to remain one means of disseminating information about emerging policies, procedures and organisational priorities. Nevertheless, it is clear that expectations of its practical learning outcomes need to remain modest. It is worth supplementing online training with facilitator-led classroom learning aimed at informing officers not only of policy and procedure, but also of the instrumental value of enhancing services to victims of crime, such as improved witness cooperation, facilitating the flow of information to the police from the community, and the broader enhancement of public satisfaction with policing in Victoria. Resource constraints mean that these packages would most likely need to be targeted at particular stations in the first instance. It is also important that such training be evaluated.

5. Front-line supervisor training

This section has argued that operational styles exert a considerable influence on individual officers’ prioritisation of victims of crime in relation to other police tasks. The job of reforming operational styles is clearly a complex and challenging one. However, it is highly likely that the most effective agents of change occupy the front-line supervisor level. Recognising this, enormous gains are possible by obtaining effective buy-in from sergeants and senior sergeants, as officers who wield considerable influence within stations. Numerous participants expressed an interest in enabling enhanced police–victim encounters, but were nevertheless unsure of the practical management tools at their disposal to do this. This report therefore recommends the development of a training package directed at front-line supervisors. As with Recommendation 4, such a training package would need to move beyond policy and procedure, towards a broader discussion of the importance of the police–victim interface for achieving witness cooperation, enhancing the flow of information to police and improving public satisfaction with policing. It should stress, therefore, that even if officers see crime fighting as a priority, there are solid, instrumental reasons for taking police–victim encounters very seriously. If front-line supervisors view victim-oriented policing as valid and useful, there is a good chance that this view will
cascade down to other front-line personnel. Moreover, it would be useful to reconvene supervisors at an interval of 12 months to review strategies and evaluate whether such training is achieving the desired aims.
6.0 Working with victims: police perceptions and experiences

Research in the area of victim of crime services in Australia has detailed the dominance of trauma-related support system models (Rock 2006). This focus has led to emotional support and trauma counselling becoming the primary support mechanisms adopted to address the ‘plight’ of victimisation, a development most evident in the areas of family violence and sexual assault which have been key areas for innovation in service delivery to victims of crime (see Hickman & Simpson 2003; Heenan & Murray 2005). Based on a survey of policy commitments across Australian state and territory policing agencies, it is clear that these areas continue to attract the most intensive and extensive support from police (Wilson & Segrave forthcoming). Elsewhere, for example, in police organisations in the US and Canada, victim support services offered by or through police cover a broad range of offences, including property offences (Wilson & Segrave forthcoming). The introduction of the Victims’ Charter in Victoria has laid the ground for a broader interpretation of the term ‘victim of crime’ and enabled a space for the recognition of both the variation in victims’ needs and the responsibility of police to ensure these needs are met. However, to date there has been no comprehensive research that examines current police experiences, attitudes and practices in relation to victims of crime.

This section is primarily concerned with how police perceive victims of crime, how they perceive their interactions with victims of crime, and what they consider victims of crime need and expect from their interactions with police. It must be stated at the outset that we do not here directly address the issue of family violence. Victoria Police procedures in relation to family violence are guided by a code of practice that stipulates particular courses of action and advocates a pro-arrest policy (Victoria Police 2010). Although discussion frequently turned to the issue of ‘domestics’ and our participants had much to say about current policy in this area, this report is not primarily concerned with this, and we will therefore not be entering into a discussion about these specific protocols. However, we have made reference to accounts of attending family violence where this elucidates more broadly police experiences of the police–victim interface.

It is police perceptions and experiences of this broader interface that form the focus of this section. We begin by examining how victims of crime may be deemed by officers to either be ‘ideal’ or ‘non-ideal’, dependent upon personal and contextual factors. We then examine how such categorisations are mobilised and assess their potential impact upon police–victim interactions. The section then turns to discussion of particular interactions with segments of the broader Victorian community – individuals from lower socioeconomic areas and members of multicultural communities. Here we note some challenges at the police–victim interface in both instances. We then explore police perceptions of victims’ needs and expectations of policing, and how these needs and expectations are met and/or negotiated. We conclude by briefly considering the issue of police as victims of crime, drawing attention to issues raised during our research in relation to the adequacy of current support mechanisms.

6.1 ‘Ideal’ and ‘non-ideal’ victims

The police tendency to categorise members of the public has long been recognised in police research (see Reiner 2010: 123–5 for an overview of these broad typologies), yet this has less often been upon in relation to police-victim interactions. Brown’s (1988) research is one exception and in presenting his findings he noted that police drew fine-grained distinctions regarding the validity of victims’ claims informed by the individual context, age, sex and gender of the victim, and the assessed degree of culpability of the victim for the occurrence of the incident. Brown (1988) suggested that the presence of drugs and alcohol strongly also influenced the credibility accorded to victims. In our research we
observed that officers utilised two broad categories in relation to the victims of crime they encountered: which embody the categories Nils Christie (1986) labelled as ‘ideal’ and ‘non-ideal’ victims. As Christie (1986) has argued, victim status is socially constructed, and those who fulfil certain criteria are more likely to be afforded the status of a legitimate victim (see also Rock 2002). For Christie (1986), the ‘ideal’ victim is vulnerable, law-abiding and pursuing legitimate goals at the time of the event. Correspondingly, the offender is clearly more powerful, pursuing illegitimate goals at the time of the event, and socially marginal. This picture, with subtle variations, was clearly what many of the officers in our research had in mind in describing ‘real’ victims. The second category, ‘non-ideal’ victim, covers a broader cross-section of the general public who interact with police as victims of crime. They may be seen as ‘non-ideal’ for several reasons: they may be viewed as culpable for their own victimisation, they may be viewed as self-interested and claiming victim status for financial reward through compensation, they may have had one or more interactions with police in the past as offenders, they may be seen as uncooperative in refusing to lay charges or attend court, the event may itself be deemed trivial and unworthy of victim status, or they may be viewed as suspect by laying a false claim to victim status when they are in fact the perpetrator.

Police frequently deal with highly specific, ambiguous and chaotic situations. As such, clear identification of the victim/s and offender/s within a particular incident can present a significant challenge. Thus, for officers at the front line, victims of crime are not always readily or easily identifiable, as one officer explained in relation to assault:

A lot of assaults ... and a lot of them here involve alcohol ... you've got your victim who's ... intoxicated, you've got your offender [who is] intoxicated and witnesses [who have] all been drinking as well and ... the water gets a bit muddied. Regional station, Const. [Uniform], 3 years with Victoria Police

This was repeatedly emphasised by participants in relation to interpersonal crime. For some particular types of crime, such as assaults in public places and family violence where drugs and alcohol are involved, there is limited evidence to identify the victim – a number of police noted that it is generally the person who is the ‘worst off’ from the incident (that is, those with the worst injuries) who will become the complainant, i.e. the ‘victim’.

This raises two important points. Firstly, in combination with the operational styles adopted (as outlined in Section 5), individual officers’ assessments of the legitimacy of a victim will contribute towards the level of service they receive. This is not to imply that some victims of crime receive a service any less professional due to such assessments. It does, however, impact on the willingness of individual officers to provide additional support over and above standard requirements. This is probably inevitable because, as Bayley notes, ‘policing at the coal face is case centred, like law, medicine or social work. It involves particular people at certain times in highly specific situations. It is not subject to generic decisions by remote commanders’ (1994: 65).

6.1.1 ‘Ideal’ victims

In at least 80 per cent of the interviews police differentiated the ‘ideal’ victim category, describing this group most often using the label ‘real’, ‘true’, ‘genuine’ and/or ‘decent’. Of interest to the researchers was how this distinction is developed and the impact it may have on policing practice. The real victim police made reference to is reflective of the ‘ideal’ victim thesis put forward by Nils Christie (1986), where the ideal victim is someone who through no fault of their own becomes a victim of crime. For example:
because if you look at the number of victims we have here as such, most people are victims of their own devices ... it’s not that many that would be your classic victim. Regional station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 28 years with Victoria Police

Christie’s (1986) work, as well as other subsequent research in this area (Rock 2002), points to gender, age, race and other characteristics of both the victim and the offender as being critical to the identification of ‘ideal’ victims, in addition to the circumstances of the crime itself – and this level of differentiation was articulated during many interviews. In describing the ‘ideal’ victim many police officers emphasised that such victims do not contribute to their own victimisation, and in this regard typically cited children, the elderly and/or ‘respectable’ people going about their daily routine who become victims through no fault of their own:

Someone that is working at the service station, who gets a knife pulled on them, I think they’re genuine victims; and people that have their houses burgled are genuine victims. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 7 years with Victoria Police

I haven’t really had a true victim yet. Like in saying that I mean someone who is completely innocent, who by no cause of their own [has] been put in a situation that they didn’t deserve to be put in. Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 1 year with Victoria Police

elderly people and very young people I give a bit of extra care to because I figure they’re the real end of the scales and they’ve probably done nothing wrong. They’ve just been in the wrong place at the wrong time. They’re what I would call true victims. Regional station, L. Snr Const. [Uniform], 28 years with Victoria Police

Critically, the selected quotes above reveal that the ‘ideal victim’ scenario has meaning for police regardless of the length of their service or seniority of their position. The interviews revealed further that perceptions of victims of crime as ideal victims can strongly impact levels of informal support. For example, officers related instances where they gave considerable support, primarily in terms of time allocation, reassurance and listening:

So the one [victim] that was crying and frightened, [I] gave them a cup of tea, sat with them ... until they were able to talk and [I] said, ‘at least you weren’t hurt and it’s very bad that this happened’. Outer urban station, Const. [Uniform], 3 years with Victoria Police

So yes I went above and beyond to see if she was alright through the whole thing ... I’d actually get in the car and drive down to check on her face to face. Outer urban station, Snr. Const. [Uniform], 8 years with Victoria Police

The idea that there are deserving victims who should and do receive additional support was consistently expressed by participants regardless of their location, level of experience or seniority, as is evident in the following quotations:

Your genuine victims, you do a little bit more to help out. Regional station, Const. [Uniform], 3 years with Victoria Police

I know that if I have a victim that is a real victim, I’ll do whatever I’ve got to do to help them. Major regional station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 6 years with Victoria Police

If it’s a genuine victim I’ll bend over backwards to try to keep in contact with them and be good to them. Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 3 years with Victoria Police
Look no doubt, whether it’s subconscious or not ... If the bloke who goes to work or the family [that] goes to work every day of their life and does everything right ... get broken [into] and it’s traumatic and all the rest, there’s no doubt that you’d probably go the extra mile. *Outer urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 12 years with Victoria Police*

These attitudes are also clearly related to perceptions of the vulnerability of individual victims, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

Especially ... the older people when they’re victims, I mean ... you’ve got to look after them a bit ... I did drop in on a lady once just because she was, oh, we caught an offender and we were actually after him for an ag burg [aggravated burglary] and I only looked at the photo and I knew who he was the day before and then he tried to break into this lady’s house and she called triple zero. When I’ve got there I’ve realised it was the crook we’ve been chasing for the ag burg ... and he’d tied up an old man and everything ... I didn’t ... let her know that part ... and we caught him and she was just a lovely old lady so I just sort of dropped in on her one day. ‘I just want to know how you’re going’, and all that, and she loved it. You just don’t get the time to do it [normally]. That was when I was on the van as well, so in my travels I said, ‘Oh, we’ll just pop in on this old lady’. But [usually] you can’t, you can’t do it. *Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 9 years with Victoria Police*

A number of officers expressed particular satisfaction when the outcome of these cases was a sentenced offender, and some indicated that they were particularly motivated in such cases to ensure the best result possible. However, such clear-cut cases of victimisation as the one described above were reported to be the exception rather than the norm. We will now turn to consider examples of those victims the participants classified as ‘non-ideal’.

6.1.2 ‘Non-ideal’ victims

Participants were quite aware that in the course of their duties they draw distinctions between ‘ideal’ and ‘non-ideal’ victims, as the following officer observed:

If you’ve been in the police force a few years, you tend to separate or at least ... mentally identify ... decent victims ... it’s someone who they had something really shit done to them and you can identify who needs a bit more support, who needs a bit more knowledge, who wants to stay in the loop and it’s like I said, the demographics we’ve got here, half of the assaults are on junkie against another junkie. We can’t even find the bloody victim three months down the track ... they’re not easy to ... get in contact with. *Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 4 years with Victoria Police*

It is apparent from our research that, as with the status of ‘ideal’ victim, the status of ‘non-ideal’ victim is mediated through a range of factors including age, gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. In this regard, we identified four broad subcategories: culpable victims, who have contributed to their own victimisation; ‘system playing’ victims, who are primarily interested in compensation or in otherwise manipulating the criminal justice system for personal or financial gain; uncooperative victims, who will not press charges or follow through with a complaint; and trivial victims, who perceive themselves as victims and seek to involve police in minor interpersonal and neighbourhood disputes. While these categories frequently overlap, we will cover each one in turn.
Culpable victims are those seen to have contributed to their own victimisation, and as Brown’s (1988) research suggests, the consumption of drugs and alcohol is a strong factor in such assessments. One officer clearly articulated this perception:

If you are a true victim, if you’re asleep in your bed, done nothing, someone comes in and breaks in and assaults you and rapes you, we go right to the edge. If you’re out there and somehow you contribute through alcohol or drug abuse or stupidity, here we go again. It’s not to say that you don’t take it seriously, but … come on I’ve got a million things and I’m listening to your whinging.

*Regional station, Snr. Const. [CIU]*

While the categorisation of members of the public as culpable victims is often based on their alcohol and drug use, it was also reported more generally in relation to the failure of individuals to follow basic crime prevention principles, such as reports of thefts from motor vehicles where vehicles were left unlocked or with windows down. A particular group of those designated to be ‘culpable victims’ deserves special mention. These are groups of lower socioeconomic status who are frequently already known to police as offenders. It is hardly surprising that those in this category should have contact with police as victims of crime also, given that the risk of crime rises for those living in lower-status areas, particularly in urban areas (Mawby & Walklate 1994). Nevertheless, the perceived involvement of these individuals in criminal and drug-using subcultures often leads to them being viewed as culpable for their victimisation. They are thus viewed as particularly problematic, as the following remarks indicate:

I’ve probably become a little bit more cynical here, because the majority of our victims are offenders as well. So they’ve got themselves into a lot of these situations … and they expect us to bow down to their every need. *Regional station, Const. [Uniform], 2 years with Victoria Police*

Are they victims of crime or have they just got their just desserts? … The law says they’re victims of crime. *Outer urban, Sgt [Uniform], 12 years with Victoria Police*

They’ve done thirty thousand burglaries or they’ve robbed 50 cars and things like that, and then something happens to them … and it’s like, well hang on a minute what about a little bit of a suffering injustice here? … *Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 3 years with Victoria Police*

Probably the worst victims are people with criminal backgrounds – burglars are the worst [when] they’re burgled, they just carry on a treat. *Outer urban station, Snr. Const. [CD], 18 years with Victoria Police*

Participants also identified victims of crime who were seen to be ‘system players’, primarily interested in victims of crime compensation or insurance claims. This view was accompanied by a suspicion that such claims were often fraudulent, and could mask attempts to obtain financial reward to cover debts incurred from gambling or drug use. Such individuals were sometimes dubbed ‘serial’ victims – members of the public adept at negotiating compensation procedures. The officers quoted below clearly identified such a group as a common feature of the police–victim interface:

A lot of people we deal with are serial victims who are really playing the system more than being true victims. *Regional station, Snr Const. (Uniform), 6 years with Victoria Police*

It’s like when robberies get reported. Now quite often they’re false reports because they’ve done their money on drugs or lost at the casino or whatever. *Outer urban, Sgt [Uniform], 12 years with Victoria Police*
quite often you get victims who are reporting stuff to us for personal gain ... some of them get their police report and go and make their insurance pay them. **Urban station, Snr Const. [CIU], 10 years with Victoria Police**

Such victims were poorly regarded by participants, not only because of suspicion surrounding their claims, but also because they were seen as uncooperative with police in assisting with criminal investigations. As one officer noted:

Some victims don’t want to be notified and they’re the ones who ... when you call them up asking for an extra statement or some photos or something else, who never turn up and go missing but that’s the same group that will ... call you up if they need something from me to get their however many thousand dollars through Victims’ of Crime hearings. But if I need help from them catching the person who did it, that’s not really ... their motivation. **Outer urban, Const. [Uniform], 1 year with Victoria Police**

Uncooperative victims were viewed as especially problematic, and this categorisation was frequently linked to cases of family violence, as the following comments suggest:

with domestic violence, I couldn’t give a shit about the victims in that, if you’re not happy in your relationship leave. Don’t ring us for help and then do nothing about it. **Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 6 years with Victoria Police**

I don’t know how many times I’ve been to court for a domestic and by the time it goes to court she’s back with him and she’ll stand up and give evidence in court saying, ‘no, I love him, I don’t want any charges pressed, blah-blah-blah’. **Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 4 years with Victoria Police**

While the above cases are specifically concerned with family violence, frustration with uncooperative victims extended to other offences. In general, uncooperative victims were seen to impede effective investigation and prosecution. One officer suggested that:

The only time it’s hard to deal with victims that I found is when they have been unwilling victims and uncooperative. So you might go to a job that’s of a serious nature, they’re the victim of something that they are uncooperative in dealing with you, you ask them to come in and make a statement, they don’t show up, when they do show up it’s too hard for them, they dilly-dally around, you know, ‘do you want us to do something about this or not?’, or you take the statements from them, you get them on the hop, they’re all fired up about what’s happened to them, you get statements from them, you charge the person and the very next day some have changed their mind, I want them uncharged and stuff like that. **Regional station, Sgt [Uniform], 9 years with Victoria Police**

Police also identify a further group who are ‘system players’ and use the police to become involved in conflicts and disagreements deemed by police to be interpersonal and trivial:

A huge proportion of those people will be making vindictive complaints against a partner and it’s only a very small minority of those victims that I, how can I say, believe to be true victims. It’s not that often that you come across a genuine person in real need of police assistance. **Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 6 years with Victoria Police**
Police are often called upon to deal with problems presented by members of the public who do not know where else to turn or are unable to seek help elsewhere. As one officer commented:

We get an awful lot of people who come in to the police station who are not reporting crime. [They’re] merely here because they don’t know who else to go to and they see us as somebody impartial that would give them correct and valid information. [They believe] that we are trustworthy. *Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 34 years with Victoria Police*

While this perception of their role was acknowledged, officers related that it was common for members of the public to attempt to embroil police in interpersonal or neighbourhood disputes which the participants deemed to be trivial and petty:

An incident at the moment and there’s a man whose house is being egged … continually, and he wasn’t happy with how the police were reacting to it. Because I mean, in the big scheme of things, that is very small. *Regional station, Const. (Uniform), 3 years with Victoria Police*

A lot of people will contact the police and use the police as a debt collection agency, ‘the next door neighbour’s stolen my hose’, or ‘so and so I used to go out with has taken some money out of my credit card account’. But people don’t want to officially report it they just want police to fix it. *Regional station, Insp., 32 years with Victoria Police*

Minor disputes, civil issues, where they thought they were victims, they feel they’ve been victimised, well, one, we don’t have any jurisdiction, two, there really isn’t a criminal matter, but there is grounds say for an intervention order, but that’s something you can do on your own behalf instead of us taking care of that for you. But … people expect us to do absolutely everything for them, and we do a lot for victims, we do as much as we can but there are times where they can do things themselves. It’s not necessarily up to us to get involved. *Urban station, Const. [Traffic], 4 years with Victoria Police*

While such incidents reflect the level and range of demands placed upon police by the public, frustration was frequently expressed, not only because such interactions were seen to waste police time, but also because members of the public were often unclear about their expectations of the police. In this regard, one officer commented:

We get so many people that come to the station, ‘I want to make a complaint’. That to our ears is a complaint against police so we kind of go what? ‘What do you mean?’ They go, ‘Oh my neighbour threw his hose at me the other day. See I’ve got a bruise on my leg’. You just kind of go, ‘Okay, what’s his name? I’ll go to his house and I’ll arrest him’. ‘No, no. don’t do that, that’ll make it worse, that’ll make it worse, I just want you to know’. What the hell do you want me to do then? Why did you even tell me? It’s difficult. *Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 4 years with Victoria Police*

‘Trivial’ victims were consequently resented for wasting police time, and presenting claims to victimhood that were seen as flimsy.

**6.1.3 Victim categorisation and the police response**

The key question is whether such categorisation of victims as either ‘ideal’ or ‘non-ideal’ influences their encounters with and experience of policing. It should be noted that many of the participants stated that
they aspire to professionalism in all dealings with members of the public, and attempt to mitigate the impact of any personal judgements they might form as to an individual’s authenticity as a victim of crime:

To me every case has exactly the same amount of importance and I try and come across that way to the person and then like I say, you see how it develops from there, but my initial reaction to every person is, ‘This is the worst thing that’s ever happened to them, how can I assist them’, and then ... work out where I’m going from there. **Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 28 years with Victoria Police**

Nevertheless, officers were generally candid that their interpretations of victimhood did have some impact upon their interactions:

I’d like to say we should treat... every victim as we would expect to be treated ourselves. But unfortunately, harking back to the type of people that we have in [inner city suburbs], and because such a vast majority of complaints are... either not police business or they’re just vindictiveness [and demanding] ‘I want this, I want that, I want this, I want that’, you speak to any uniform member that’s worked at the front counter for a period of time and they’ll just say [that]... you come away from there drained at the end of the day. Everybody deserves to be listened to without being prejudged [but] that’s the problem here, people are prejudged at the counter, [it’s like] ‘oh god another one’. **Outer urban station, Snr Const. [CIU], 6 years with Victoria Police**

I think an example of what not to do, and I’ve seen it done, is that someone who may not be of good character in the past may then present as a victim and we have to treat them... accordingly. And a lot of members won’t do that because ... that person’s already tainted... **Regional station, Const. (Uniform), 3 years with Victoria Police**

Generally it was reported that non-ideal victims do not receive unprofessional service. Rather, participants distinguished between the treatment of ‘ideal’ and ‘non-ideal’ victims by explaining that with non-ideal victims they simply ‘go through the motions’ professionally, that is there is no willingness to do anything extra or additional for victims considered to be ‘non-ideal’. This was consistently reported by police across a range of rank, role and experience in policing when discussing how they respond to the victimisation of known offenders, for example:

It’s a lot harder to be compassionate [when cases involve drug addicts] because it’s one bad habit feeding another unfortunately, but there’s still a job to do and we still have to investigate it the same as you would any other matter. **Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 1 year with Victoria Police**

Yeah, like [in cases where the victim has] got as bad a rap sheet as the person that offended them in the first place. I... find it hard to sit there and sympathise, but I just do it – well, I don’t pretend I care too much or not enough. **Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 1 year with Victoria Police**

Your personal attitude towards [the victim] and everything [is] vastly different I suppose [when the victim is also a known offender]. But the actual work that you do in the background wouldn’t be any different. **Regional station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 6 years with Victoria Police**
[In those cases], we just do the bare minimum [and say,] ‘see you later’. We don’t spell it out to them, but we don’t do anything other than the bare minimum. *Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Crime Desk], 13 years with Victoria Police*

I don’t think it affects the way that we deal with them or what we do investigative, but perhaps [we are] not as sympathetic, that would be the only difference. *Outer urban station, Snr Const. [CIU], 5 years with Victoria Police*

The impact of such distinctions thus was reported to have little influence over fulfilling the baseline requirements of police procedure and investigation. It is evident that different types of victims of crime do, however, receive a different ‘bedside manner’ in response to such distinctions.

### 6.2 Community groups

While participants focused on crime victims in relation to the type of crime, we sought also to identify the extent to which any particular groups within the community raised different or particular issues in relation to victimisation. These findings overlap with the discussions with participants on family violence, where socioeconomic and cultural differences were primarily identified as influencing the nature of victimisation and the response of victims generally. Population differences such as age group or the numbers of families that police regularly come into contact with also influence the nature of police work. The participants’ responses revealed the broad range of individuals and circumstances with which police engage daily and the diversity of the communities in Victoria. It was recognised that, across Victoria, victims of crime primarily come from the lowest socioeconomic groups in any given area, and that police work is largely generated within such areas. Beyond this subdivision of the community, it was mainly newly settled migrant communities who were identified as presenting significant challenges for police work.

#### 6.2.1 Socially and economically disadvantaged communities

It has been an axiomatic observation of much police research (Choongh 1997; Loftus 2009; Reiner 2010) that the vast majority of police interactions with members of the public are with people from the most economically and socially disadvantaged strata of society, and this is no less true of Australia than it is of other jurisdictions. As David Bayley has noted, ‘by and large, the people police deal with are life’s refugees. Uneducated, poor, often unemployed, they are both victims and victimizers’ (1994: 24). While there is considerable variation in this picture across the state, it is significant for many stations, particularly those in larger regional and metropolitan centres. While we need not explore the full implications of this scholarship here, it is pertinent to the present research in terms of specific issues that arise in relation to police interactions with victims of crime in economically marginalised communities. Some of these issues have already been alluded to in the subsection dealing with ‘non-ideal’ victims. Thus, members of the public who are known to be, or suspected to be, involved in criminal and/or drug-using cultures are often perceived to be culpable victims, for placing themselves in positions that have led to their victimisation. However, given the sometimes significant past histories of adversarial encounters with police as offenders, socioeconomically disadvantaged communities can also be uncooperative, as the following account relates:

I speak in reference to the commission housing areas where obviously more often than not families are unemployed or of low income even though I suppose the inner suburbs are changing. We’ve got some nice houses in the area, some nicer people moving in. But we’ve still got the element of the old school ... residents. They’ve been here for four generations but still reside in
the area. So I think there’s a mentality of many problems in the area, they prefer to deal with it themselves .... It may be because families have been charged by police before. There’ll be a certain element of mistrust or hatred [of police] because family members have been charged or they’ve been charged themselves. So they prefer to deal with it themselves. I attended a stabbing late last year in the low-rise commission housing area. A bloke was stabbed across the face, a couple of times in the back. He had some serious stab wounds. His girlfriend was in the house at the time. She told the police that she didn’t see a thing. She was not too sure who it was. And he said that he didn’t want to make a complaint to the police so in terms of investigating that, it didn’t go anywhere. And considering the seriousness of it, it was a little bit disappointing .... it makes our job difficult. But obviously though, the chap that was stabbed was well known to us [and] he holds a very strong anti-police mentality. So it’s going to be difficult to change his mindset. There’s not a great deal we can do. I don’t know how you could go about changing that mentality of some of the residents here. Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 5 years with Victoria Police

Ironically, those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged were also reported to place the highest strain on police resources in terms of ‘trivial’ victimisation aimed at involving police in minor neighbourhood or interpersonal disputes. This is presented by the police in our research, in a way that has been described by Reiner (2010). In Reiner’s interpretation, members of the public are termed ‘rubbish’ when they make calls upon police that are ‘seen as messy, intractable, unworthy of attention or the complainants own fault’ (2010: 124). While the term ‘rubbish’ was not used by participants in our research, the general perception of such calls for police assistance was similar. As one officer recollected of her time in a station located in a lower socioeconomic area:

But when I was in Frankston [where there’s] a lot of very, very poor white areas ... they just rang through with everything, ‘she stole my smokes, he stole my bong’ [laughs]. Regional station, Snr Const. (SOCAU), 14 years with Victoria Police

The claims of members of these communities with whom police come into contact were thus viewed as ‘non-ideal’, as portions of the community were seen as either antagonistic towards the police or prone to consuming police time with tawdry, interpersonal disputes.

6.2.2 Multicultural communities

Over half of the participants expanded on issues related to multicultural community groups, including Indigenous Australians but more often in relation to recently settled migrant groups, thereby recognising the level of diversity in their local area command. Across Victoria we have a diverse multicultural community and that diversity includes second- and third-generation migrants plus more recently settled populations from China, India, Korea, East African nations and the Middle East. Diversity was not itself automatically associated with challenges or concerns during the interviews, yet language was often raised as a potential challenge; although not all respondents saw language barriers as a significant problem in their daily police work.

Newly settled migrant communities were identified as an important subgroup of potential and actual victims with whom police can work. The issue of communication between police and multicultural, particularly recently settled migrant, communities was perceived in a range of ways across the stations. Respondents did not generally discuss Indigenous populations as a group that stands out in relation to police–victim interaction, and while many of the stations that participated in the study have diverse ethnic groups within their communities, not all participants noted this group as raising specific issues in
relation to police work and victimisation. Most often it was in stations located in areas where populations are undergoing significant change, including the increase in the numbers of recently settled migrants, where police consistently identified challenges in their interactions with victims.

Many of these issues raised by police were focused on the perception of cultural differences and the communication breakdown that resulted from what participants described as misunderstanding on both sides (i.e. police and the individual/s). For example, in some regional areas differences were cited between migrant communities and the general community in terms of the operation of family units. This specifically related to ethnic groups in which gender roles are perceived differently and strictly observed, and where there are limited English-language skills, so that when police might be called to a situation (by neighbours, for example) there is often an unwillingness for migrant women to talk to police, and more generally an unwillingness for men or women to talk to female police officers. For police members this often means trying to ensure that they were respectful and taking care not to overstep any cultural protocols/boundaries:

Sometimes you put a foot wrong but you know that’s all part of the learning experience. But generally speaking you just try and be respectful of where they’re coming from and by the same token try and get your side across. So yeah, generally it’s not too bad, I don’t find it too much of a problem. (Fo_SC_U_28) Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 28 years with Victoria Police

A number of police identified that assistance with bridging these divides, learning more about different cultural groups in their area, and developing ties with local community groups would improve their daily interactions with these communities. In a number of locations the issue police highlighted was the unwillingness of these communities to involve police in any matters. This was identified in some regional stations as an area that police were actively committed to addressing via ongoing efforts to interact in positive ways with recently settled communities. However, this commitment and effort varied across the stations.

In both urban and regional stations, the issue of communication was most often focused on language skills. Responding to incidents where victims had limited English skills was for some a source of frustration, particularly in relation to the use of telephone interpreters. However, this was not the case for all police. While some stated that if English was not spoken or not spoken well they simply utilised the interpreter phone service, others did so but felt that this was a dissatisfying experience, as it limited the ability of police to feel sure that all the appropriate information had been shared. Few police indicated that they drew on cultural/community liaison officers to assist in these situations. The following comments demonstrate the diversity of views in relation to language differences:

Language once or twice [has been a problem with] some Somali offenders, [who were] very hard to interview. But luckily there is a fairly large Somali group down in [a nearby regional centre]. There is one fellow in particular who is quite happy to come up and assist [us] to communicate. That’s pretty good. Yes, every now and again, but here, well at one time there was a Greek bloke who was in and we needed an interpreter service and [this station] had not used an interpreter service for so long that we had to set up an account. (Regional station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 7 years with Victoria Police)

I’ve had a number of family violence incidents lately within the Turkish community, and obviously there’s cultural differences and everything there ... it can be a big language barrier .... I sat the other day for an hour on the phone to a telephone interpreter service, they could not find a Turkish interpreter for me. So I ended up having to book an interpreter for a victim of a breach
of intervention order, she was quite upset. Well the interpreter couldn’t come and see me until the following day … so I just had to send her away until the next day because there was … nothing that I could do. Luckily she was alright, but in a situation where we might need to get an application done at court or something, what do you do in that situation where I can’t send her away? She might have to sit with me for four hours and wait for an interpreter. A horrible situation. Major regional station, Sgt [Family Violence], 7 years with Victoria Police

The interpreting service is really convenient. I don’t have an issue getting them on the phone straight away to talk to the person or booking them to come out and do a statement and stuff like that, so that hasn’t been really too much of an issue, just trying to directly work out what they’re trying to say and what language they’re speaking. But after that, as soon as you get onto that you know the numbers to call and it gets sorted out. Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 1 year with Victoria Police

I had one Vietnamese woman who I was trying forever to try and get a statement from her and every time we would book an interpreter, the public purse pays for it, and it doesn’t matter how important you tell them it is that they turn up to this appointment because this is what you’ve done, they just don’t turn up and don’t think it’s a problem that they didn’t turn up. Then you have to reschedule and do it again and again and again, and it starts to get a little bit frustrating. You don’t always win. Urban station, Snr Const. [CIU], 8 years with Victoria Police

The final issue arising from our research in relation to migrant and newly emerging communities bridged the cultural and communication challenges. There were significant differences, as noted above, regarding police experiences in different stations, and some of these differences related to participants distinguishing between ‘reticent’, ‘cooperative’ and ‘demanding’ communities (usually in reference to recent Indian migrants). Where some groups were identified as reluctant to report crime to police, other groups demanded more from police than could be provided in the circumstances. At the time that this research was conducted there was public debate around the perceived targeting of Indian students as victims of crime (both theft and/or assault), and some police were insistent that this was a reflection not of race-driven offending, but of the willingness of some migrant and recently arrived communities to report crime and to demand support and assistance.

Participants were aware that attitudes towards reporting to the police were possibly related to prior experiences of policing in an individual’s country of origin, and reluctance to involve outsiders in disputes:

They’ve got cultural issues [and] some … language barriers, more so for the parents than the young people. So, depending on which country they’ve come from, they might view police differently and police might act differently where they’ve come from to here, so they can be issues. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Youth officer], 15 years with Victoria Police

A difficulty can be their reluctance to report crime and then their reluctance to seek any ongoing counselling. I’m just talking about recent incidents that I can recall. They’re perhaps more closed, just to say, look it happened, well I’ll report it if it’s been brought to the police attention and [then] they’re happy to continue through the court process, but as far as [coming forward] they’re usually fairly reluctant. Outer urban station, Snr Sgt [CIU], 18 years with Victoria Police

These reasons for a failure to report to police are similar to those cited in Chan’s (1997: 109) research, which also noted that the most common reasons given for difficulties identified by police in dealing with multicultural communities (at the time referred to as non-English speaking background, or NESB,
communities) were related to cultural traditions, previous experience in country of origin, fear of reprisals and community attitudes. In Chan’s study (1997), however, 35 per cent of respondents cited a lack of communication between police and respective communities as the source of difficulties.

Two key issues were repeatedly mentioned in relation to interactions with multicultural communities: cultural traditions that proved problematic at crime scenes and gender relations. Both were seen as creating difficulties for following routine procedures and conducting investigations. In relation to cultural traditions, a particular issue relating to the removal of footwear, and access to properties, was raised. The following accounts are exemplary here:

well this happened last [night], I had to go down and check a house for a missing person and to verify that everything was … above board, like his room hadn’t been ransacked … and it was a Muslim family …. So mum wouldn’t let us in and she had reported it, she’s the victim so to speak, because her son has gone. She wants our help to find her son and I am explaining to her that I have to come into her house to check his room, I only want to check his room to see if I can find anything to let us find him. You have to take your shoes off. I said, no, because I’m here to do this job and if something on my radio goes, someone has been shot, I can’t be wasting time to get my shoes on. I apologise, I’m not trying to be difficult. That’s the situation. Domestics are the same. A woman I’ve seen before and lots of other times [always says] take your shoes off [but] … I’m not going [in]to the house … there might be smashed glass, it’s about me as well. [I may] possibly have to wrestle with [the] husband to get him out of the house [and then am I going to] … stand there for a minute … to put my shoes back on. No. [In the] end [it is usually] … okay to walk on the tiles … but we can’t walk on the carpet. She got linen out and put it over the carpet. But then she thought instead of engaging us she was so concerned with cleaning the tiles, which we didn’t have any dirty shoes on. But anyway that was what we had to deal with daily. We got the job done, we apologised, it was a difficult situation, at least she compromised. Some of them won’t. Outer urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 12 years with Victoria Police

Cultural attitudes towards gender were also viewed as problematic for conducting investigations. This was reported as particularly difficult in situations when female officers are dispatched to incidents and male household members refuse to acknowledge the authority of a female officer. The comment below describes this problem:

a male victim … in a property incident won’t talk to the female. We have 54 per cent women here … nearly every day I’m working with a woman … police officer … And they won’t talk to them, because they are women. Outer urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 12 years with Victoria Police

This can result in frustration and intolerance on the part of officers, who see cultural norms as a significant barrier to police procedure. Moreover, there was a minority view that multicultural communities should adjust to the Australian criminal justice context. As one officer expressed:

I understand that that’s their culture, but you’re in this country and you abide by our laws and if you’ve been beating your missus up or whatever then you’re going to be dragged out of the house and we’re going to talk to her. That’s just the way it is … I’ve been at jobs where they’ve been angry about that … I went … to a suicide involving an Afghan family where the daughter committed suicide and one of the older brothers … got really angry at me because I was speaking to the other sister, and she was giving us some information about her sister’s previous suicide attempts … and he didn’t want that out and he was getting very angry … that I was even speaking
to her ... but, as I said to him, we have to do things that way ... We’re not going to come and talk to the frigging head of the family and then leave and believe everything he says; we’re going to talk to everybody so that’s just how it goes. So it is hard but we have to do the job, we have to do it that way. Outer urban station, Const. [Uniform], 1 year with Victoria Police

Considerable unease in relation to dealing with multicultural communities was expressed by some officers. One reason put forward for this is that multicultural communities are potentially ‘disarmers’ (Holdaway 1983; Reiner 2010). ‘Disarmers’ are members of socially vulnerable groups from whom allegations of misconduct might receive special public sympathy. At the time of the interviews being carried out, when incidents of violence against Indian students were receiving saturation media coverage, this was seen as particularly difficult. As one officer noted:

it’s a hot topic now, the Indian issue, and I’ve found that Indians are reporting things to us that are not even crimes and they are now seeing us as being – they’ll come to us with some simple dispute, debt or whatever and ... they are quite hard to deal with because obviously they’re pretty down on us at the moment. They think that we don’t care about them and then that makes it even worse when they come and report some civil debt that’s got nothing to do with the police and you tell them that and then they get angry at you or they’ll come in and report that somebody over the street yelled at them or something, or swore at them, and you think, ‘Well, there’s nothing I can do about that’, and I get nervous telling them that because I wonder whether the next day I’m going to be on the front page of the Herald Sun for not helping them because it’s just so – so that’s quite hard at the moment. And I find that pretty nerve-wracking at the moment because you don’t want to do the wrong thing there because it will just turn into the biggest deal in the world if you don’t handle something with an Indian student at the moment. So I’m finding that pretty hard at the moment. Outer urban station, Const. [Uniform], 1 year with Victoria Police

For some officers, the task of policing a multicultural society seemed quite overwhelming, and something they were both uneasy about and/or felt unprepared [i.e. not ready, not well supported by the organisation] to undertake.

For example, the recently settled Sudanese, you can’t bring someone from a war-torn country and just pop them in the middle of Victoria and leave them be, it’s just ridiculous. They don’t have a BBQ and invite just their friends and family, when they have a BBQ they invite their whole bloody community. So you could have two or three hundred people and we had it on the weekend, congregating at a BBQ ... they all associate together, you can’t reason with them, you can’t do anything. It’s impossible to try and deal with all these ethnic cultures, impossible, it’s only going to get worse. Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 11 years with Victoria Police

There was also a perception, based in some cases on experience, that some communities are not only reticent to contact the police but are also openly hostile. As one officer commented about the Sudanese community:

The Sudanese community ... don’t seem to like the police. As soon as you speak to them straight away they’ve got their back up, they think we’re racist and you can’t explain to them. Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 11 years with Victoria Police

The challenges for many officers in working with victims of crime from multicultural communities are therefore significant. These extend beyond language barriers, although these are significant. They are
rooted in the relationships between police and multicultural communities and the challenges faced in building these relationships. The following comment by an officer succinctly summarises these challenges from a police perspective:

I think cultural diversity can be a little bit challenging in a sense that I don’t really understand how some people deal with things the way they do. Then it’s about me… learning about their culture and why they react… or do things a certain way. It seems sometimes completely absurd to me that they would react a certain way or they would want things to happen a certain way. A lot of that can be culturally based. Or where you have a language barrier can be difficult. It can be a little bit frustrating. You’re wanting to help so much and there’s also a lot in it for us because you need the cooperation of your victim to continue with the investigation. When you don’t have that and you seem to be working so hard at it and they just can’t even be bothered replying to your call. Urban station, Snr Const. [CIU], 8 years with Victoria Police

Building relationships of trust with multicultural communities across Victoria is clearly a broader challenge confronting Victoria Police. Importantly a number of police identified this challenge and articulated possible solutions that were being trialled or which could be implemented in the future:

There are obviously different cultures, and… there’s a couple of cultures where you know the basics, you know that men won’t speak to women, or you know that women are not allowed to speak to men, so you work that out. And if you’re going to a Turkish home, you send a male and a female police officer, do you understand what I mean? And you work those things out, but there’s a number of cultures, especially new… migrant groups like the Sudanese. People won’t know the basics… So in this area we do cultural awareness training regarding the Indigenous or Aboriginal community and that’s beneficial because obviously we do have such a high Aboriginal community. However, we don’t, and this is only personal opinion, we probably don’t do enough with the whole community, because we have always had a high Indigenous population, which we still do. Major regional station, Sgt [family Violence], 7 years with Victoria Police

If we could, especially with the Sudanese community which… is massively growing here… and they have little understanding of the police, it’s a totally different police force to what they’re used to so… if we were able to sit down and talk to them and say listen this is who we are, introduce just tell them our names, because at the Academy they do that… it’s all formal and it’s come and sit down and have a cup of tea, and it’s just different when you’re out there, but if we did have that time, then that family when we walk away, that family would be saying, ‘oh they were nice, I’d have no hesitation in calling them next time’, but there’s some members of the community that don’t want to call us, not that they hate us, they just don’t have faith in us, because of maybe prior dealings we’ve had before. Outer urban station, Const. [Uniform], 1 year with Victoria Police

Many front-line officers recognise there is a deficit in cultural knowledge among police members in relation to multicultural communities. Some suggestions for how this deficit might be reduced are included in the recommendations. It is critical to note that potential solutions needs to be developed by and/or with police who are working on the ground, interacting daily with the community in order to realise relevant change that will positively impact police and the communities they work with.

The Station Study Report: Victoria Police and Victims of Crime
6.3 Victims’ needs and expectations

Given that police are the first, and frequently only, criminal justice agency with which victims of crime will interact, we considered it important to gather the perspectives of front-line officers on victims’ needs and expectations. On some levels, the responses were predictable. Generally, participants indicated that victims wanted at least one (or a combination) of four things: (1) to feel safe and reassured that the crime will not happen again; (2) to be compensated; (3) to be heard (i.e. someone listens to and believes their version of events); and (4) for the offender to be caught and charged (i.e. that justice be done). There are, however, three important observations offered by participants that are significant for the present discussion. The first is that for general duties officers, who deal with large amounts of volume crime and interpersonal violence of varying severity, it was perceived that there are a large group of victims of crime who require relatively little support. The second is that support should not necessarily be conceived narrowly in terms of trauma intervention and counselling, but also needs to involve practical interventions in terms of crime prevention advice, information, and financial and other material assistance. The third point is that the severity of impact of the crime is not necessarily connected to the perceived severity of the offence. Thus, members of the public react in various ways to criminal events, and many officers were cognisant that noting this variability was an important aspect of the police–victim interface. As one officer remarked:

I would say that an older person, an elderly person’s house been burgled would have probably more of an impact than a lot of the rapes. And it’s the person and their circumstances about what they need, more than the crime itself. And I think every victim’s got the right to be followed up appropriately. Regional, Snr Const. (SOCAU), 21 years with Victoria Police

Contrary to the assumptions underpinning many victim mechanisms, it was reported that the diversity of victims’ needs was not always directly linked to the type of crime experienced, and that often for most crimes the most immediate needs were practical as well as, or rather than, psychological. These findings reiterated the findings of other research emphasising that the traditional focus on counselling services in the provision of support does not address the full range of needs of those who experience crime, who often need more practical crime prevention and household support (see Rock 2006; Davis et al. 1999).

6.3.1 Assessing need

While participants were aware of the differential impact of crime on individual members of the public, they nevertheless did rank severity in relation to crime type. Generally participants identified that victims of crimes against the person have significant needs:

The support, the amount of support that’s required for someone that’s actually been assaulted or had something – a life-changing experience will be much greater than that that’s well, a burglary for instance where it’s just a matter of them notifying the insurance and getting their goods back. I mean sometimes, if they lose sentimental items, it can be on a larger scale but generally, no, they don’t need as much support. Urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 20 years with Victoria Police

Generally, the discussion around how victims’ needs differed pointed to the seriousness of the offence and whether it was an interpersonal or property offence. The crime type tended to impact on both the time spent at a call-out and the attitude of the officers to the victim, in terms of awareness of the potential impact of the crime on the victim’s general wellbeing. As one officer explained:
I suppose [sexual] assaults ... you have a lot more of dealing with victims because it’s more of a personal sort of offence ... whereas victims of a property offence you don’t tend to spend as much time with them, although it’s still a personal sort of offence. *Urban station, Const. (Traffic), 4 years with Victoria Police*

Thus, some participants drew a clear distinction between the impact of crimes against the person and that of property crime, as the following comment reveals:

That sort of goes back to the offence as well. As I said, a car theft victim, you can only do so much. They’re not in an emotional state of discomfort, yeah. But for instance with someone who’s been involved in a serious assault, often members will go back and see them on a fortnightly, or bi-monthly basis sort of, and often every now and again and check on their welfare ... Everyone is treated on their own merits pretty much. *Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 1 year with Victoria Police*

The discussion, however, became more complex when it turned to the issue of property crime. This is a significant issue, as the current mechanisms for victim support in Victoria, and in Australia generally, offer very little for victims of property crime. We therefore now address this specifically.

### 6.3.2 Property crime

Property crime is clearly a significant element of police work, particularly general duties, yet victims of property crime have less often been the focus of research into victimisation (for exceptions, see Shover 1991; Maguire 1991). Here we consider police perceptions of the impact of property crime on victims. First, we note that, victims of property crime capture a diverse group reflecting the range of types of property crime police encounter, as the comments below demonstrate:

I suppose property stuff i[s] the bulk of it because we’ve got [the] Shopping Centre and a couple of [additional] big shopping centres where we just get thefts constantly. *Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 4 years with Victoria Police*

Working general duties; mostly you’re just coming across people via the watch tower, getting a lot of phone calls from victims who are victims of property type offences, criminal damages, burglary ... mostly offences against property. *Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 3 years with Victoria Police*

A lot of thefts [are from farms] because farms can now be a conglomerate of different properties that are owned by one company or by a farm ... so you get thefts from sheds and you get stock thefts. *Remote station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 12 years with Victoria Police*

In discussing property crime and victims of property crime, there was significant variation within and between stations. Differences within a station were due in part to the variation in the roles and ranks of the participants, and to the presence of specialised units in the station. For example, of the stations included in this study 11 (of 19) had a Crime Desk in operation, which meant that the majority of cases of property crime were not dealt with by Uniform members at the station. The difference between stations reflected the significant variation based on location. Thus, while property crime was consistently a key area of police work across the state, the type of property crime varied considerably based on the prosperity and socioeconomic composition of the area, and on the station jurisdiction in terms of whether it comprised primarily residential, retail, industrial or farming areas. Regardless of location, however, the majority of police reported that addressing the needs of victims of property crime was, in
many instances, largely restricted to completing the necessary paperwork for insurance purposes. As one officer suggested:

Probably 75 per cent of the victims are insured, their biggest problem is the hassle with the insurance company. It’s in most cases like that, there’s a positive input for them in that they get reimbursed. *Outer urban station, L. Snr Const. [Uniform], 39 years with Victoria Police*

Thus, what were viewed as routine property crimes were considered to have a negligible impact on victims in terms of emotional distress, as one officer suggested in discussing thefts from motor vehicles:

Most of my victims are victims of car thefts or whatever, or theft of motor vehicles so there’s not that emotional drain on the victim or anything. They’re a bit upset but half the time they did the wrong thing and left their laptop in the back seat ... I’m thinking, ‘you’re not a victim, you just made a stupid choice’. *Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 1 year with Victoria Police*

Despite such views, there was an acknowledgement that property crime could be traumatic for individual victims, depending upon the context and location in which it happened, as another officer noted:

I got a bloke from a wealthy suburb who rang up before and his letterbox had been ripped off and he was mortified, absolutely mortified. But if you’ve lived in Dandenong all your life your letterbox has probably been knocked off, so there’s your two different interpretations there so the man who’s completely mortified that this has happened to him, he probably needs more following up than the person that has had it happen to them time and time again. *Regional station, Sgt [Uniform], 9 years with Victoria Police*

Consequently, officers did intuitively observe a phenomenon revealed by empirical research, namely, that property crimes could be significantly traumatising for some victims dependent on the context in which they occurred and the individual disposition of the victim (Kilpatrick & Acierno 2003; Maguire 1991). The following excerpts from the data are telling on this point:

You sort of don’t really, you’re looking at people who’d had property crime or something like that and you don’t really see them as the victim in it, because they’ve still got their health and all that sort of stuff so I suppose you put it in the rank of importance .... But I think some people just react differently ... some are just like, ‘oh, this is a hassle’, whereas other people are just hysterical. *Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 6 years with Victoria Police*

Well I guess some of the burgs you go to, you get some pretty devastated people. You go in, you do all the reports, or you might see a crime scene there but ... that’s it, you move on and ... they’ve just lost their telly and their money and they’ve had their house gone through and some of them don’t cope with that terribly well and ... suddenly you’ve just left ... so for them to have somebody then follow them up and see how they are travelling, what they need ... would have to help. But you see not everybody is going to need that. *Major regional station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 6 years with Victoria Police*

While in many cases police can do very little, a number of officers highlighted the importance of the police providing reassurance in property crimes when people return home to find their home burgled:

If you’re a young woman living in a flat on your own and the police don’t roll up and look under the bed or in the cupboards and, on the odd occasion, we go to one, you do that, so that it’s completely safe for them. The most important thing is personal contact because when your
A house gets broken into, you want to see the police. But you look at it as if your mum and dad got robbed, or your sister, what would they want? They’d want the cops on their doorstep and I think they’re entitled to that. But we haven’t got enough people. Outer urban station, L. Snr Const. [Uniform], 39 years with Victoria Police

There’s certain burgs where you think, yeah, it’s just a burg, that’s all it is; there’s no psychological impact. But there’s others you go to where they are traumatised, really traumatised. I don’t think burglaries should be black and white classified as offences against property, because somebody’s broken into your house and gone through your bedroom, gone through your underwear drawer, stolen your engagement ring, stolen your video camera of your family holiday, then he’s gone into your kid’s room and he’s gone through your kid’s drawers, he’s stolen your kid’s money box, he’s stolen your kid’s DX, he’s done all that, he’s gone to your fridge, he’s eaten some food, and he’s gone, without you knowing why did he choose your house? Is he going to come back? It leaves people traumatised and I don’t think it should be black and white an offence against property. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Crime Desk], 13 years with Victoria Police

Property crime, and in particular burglary, was thus reported to be an offence of highly variable impact on victims of crime. The responses of police are consequently also variable, and range from routine investigation and reporting, through to more elaborate deployment of ‘bedside manner’ and reassurance where victims are perceived as vulnerable and traumatised.

6.3.3 What do victims want?

As the previous discussion reveals, victims of crime are perceived to have varying needs, and the majority of victims of crime encountered by general duties officers are seen as requiring initial empathy and information about the process of the investigation and its likely outcome. Police views on what victims require is obviously informed by their training, experience and, more recently, the particular protocols and procedures under which they must operate. In the aftermath of a crime, victims may have various needs that may be practical, emotional, or both (Goodey 2005: 121). A desire that is more complex to negotiate and address – the desire of some victims for justice – will be discussed later in this section. We commence, however, with what is identified by the more ‘victim-oriented’ officers as a crucial facet of good policing: the cultivation of an appropriate ‘bedside manner’.

There is a significant body of police–community research that has found that the most significant impact on victim satisfaction with police is created by an officer’s ‘bedside manner’, which includes ‘their politeness, helpfulness, and fairness’, ‘how willing they are to listen to people’s stories and show concern for their plight’ and their ‘willingness to give advice and notify victims of progress in their case’ (Skogan 2005: 310). Police officers who adopted a ‘victim-oriented’ operational style reflected the values outlined by Skogan (2005). Many police officers in our research – ranging from recruits with less than 12 months’ experience to those with over 20 and 30 years’ experience – identified the quality of their initial contact as crucial to the quality of police–victim encounters:

Compassion. They want to know that you understand what they’re going through. They want great service, they want feedback and they want follow-up. Outer urban station, Const. [Uniform], 3 years with Victoria Police

I think they just want validation from the police that a crime has occurred and someone is listening to them. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Crime Desk], 26 years with Victoria Police
I suppose what they want in general terms is a bit of empathy and understanding about what’s going on and attention to it because whilst these things are run-of-the-mill for us every one of them is trauma to them. *Outer urban station, Sgt [Crime Desk], 38 years with Victoria Police*

I guess initially they just want somebody to talk to. They want to be able to put a face, they want to have somebody to attend and say this is the police, they’re here, they’re in uniform, they’re dealing with my problem, or their problem. *Outer Urban station, Snr Const. [CIU], 6 years with Victoria Police*

Simple as that: they want to know that somebody cares about what’s occurred to them. *Outer urban station, Sgt [Management], 27 years with Victoria Police*

First thing like I suppose most victims they want something safe, whether it’s safe by talking to you, they feel safe, that is I would think that is, for them be very, just to feel safe, yeah. A lot of the times people call us and they know that effectively, there’s been no crime committed and what have you, but they just want a police presence so they can feel safe for that period of time. *Urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 20 years with Victoria Police*

Nevertheless, it was reported that officers have varying capacities for adopting a ‘bedside manner’, with some officers dealing with victims of crime in a more perfunctory style:

Victims need empathy …. Some members who I work with they say, ‘You don’t have to be friendly, just have to be civil’. I’m thinking, ‘That’s really crap just being civil. Just have to be civil’. So they’ve got in their mind that ‘I will be detached from this situation’, which is fine, but to have some kind of empathy towards someone, who’s especially suffered a loss or they’ve never been assaulted before or it might be their 27th assault … and police tend to think, ‘You know you can’t – it’s so easy to work your problems out, go and work them out for goodness sake. We’re not welfare workers’, but … I think if we can make a change or if we can appear to be neutral to victims … it goes some way to start them on some sort of rehabilitation. They think, ‘Well I’ve had a good contact with the police, if it ever happens again’. And that’s the problem with country policing if you show them some time and some effort. *Regional station, Snr Sgt [Uniform], 25 years with Victoria Police*

Bedside manner is thus closely tied to the operational styles of individual officers as outlined in Section 5. Moreover, it is also contingent on the assessment of each situation and the degree to which victims are perceived as either ‘ideal’ or ‘non-ideal’.

Participants were also keenly aware that victims of crime want information, about the investigation and its progress, and about court processes generally. Indeed, some victims of minor property offences such as theft from a motor vehicle were reported to be satisfied with a realistic assessment of the investigation’s likely success (or lack thereof) and an outline of the process. One officer explained such a routine interaction:

You find a lot of people will call up and make a report and you’ll explain the process to them and they’re like, ‘Look, I understand that you’re probably never going to get my stuff back or you’re never going to find anybody, the offender, but I just want to report it’, which is fair enough. Especially most of the time’s looking at a lot of theft from motor vehicles all that kind of thing, they understand that it’s highly unlikely they’re going to get the gear back or we’re going to find an offender but they just want to let us know what’s happening and obviously for insurance reasons and things like that. *Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 3 years with Victoria Police*
However, while officers were aware that information in relation to court processes was frequently desired, this was an area where some participants felt over-extended and unable to provide the level of support they considered appropriate:

Most people that I deal with have no real idea about the court system and don’t know what to expect, don’t realise they’re going to be getting up in the box and ... they expect they’re going to be treated like a victim, which they are, but they get treated like an offender by the defence counsel and they just have no idea of the processes involved and what to expect ... We try to do that at the moment, but we don’t have the time. In between us trying to get the briefs done and ring up, and we touch base with them and we’re going to court on this date, and then you get to court and you speak to the solicitors and negotiate with the defence counsel and the victim is sitting there waiting and you’re like, ‘are you okay?’ ... No, we can’t do it adequately. *Outer urban station, Const. [Uniform], 3 years with Victoria Police*

Participants also recognised that the timely provision of information on cases was needed by many victims; indeed, a number of participants saw this as the primary need of victims of crime, often above counselling. As one officer noted:

Then, as soon as you do, say, ‘Yeah, look, it’s going ahead. He’s getting, the person’s getting charged. This is when it’s going to court. This is what can happen at court’....I think that’s the sort of follow-up of what they’re looking for. I don’t think they’re really looking for personal counselling or anything like that. I think they just want to be informed with the process and what happens and where it’s going. *Outer Urban station, Snr Const. [CIU], 8 years with Victoria Police*

While keeping victims of crime informed was acknowledged by participants to be an important aspect of police–victim interactions, they conceded that this remained imperfect and inconsistent. As one officer remarked, this is a frequent cause of victim dissatisfaction:

The victims that I’ve spoken to, the thing that they ... mention that’s lacking is the follow-up. The follow-up and the information sharing afterwards. *Major regional station, Sgt [Family Violence], 7 years with Victoria Police*

Some officers noted that the provision of clear information about when victims would be contacted was particularly important, not only in meeting victims’ needs but also in managing demands from individual victims:

I normally say, ‘I will get in contact with you when something gets done’, so they stop calling me because it’s very time consuming when you come into work and even if you’re here early then your name gets over the PA and you’re like, oh I’m not even starting work yet and they’re calling. *Outer urban station, Const. [Uniform], 2 years with Victoria Police*

Another important aspect of police–victim information exchange was informing victims of realistic timeframes, and explaining how procedures and processes work. There are several motivations for providing timely information and explanations of processes to victims of crime, which frequently coexist. While ‘victim-oriented’ and ‘pragmatist’ officers may do so out of concern for the victim’s wellbeing or through a desire to progress the investigation, it can also be seen as important in avoiding public complaints. As one officer explained:

If you can communicate what happens to them it will save you in the long run, maybe ringing up all the time. If you effectively communicate the process and what’s happening, and if something...
happens and you ring them and say this is where we’re at, and they go yeah, thanks for that, no worries, they should be fine. It’s when if they ring up and say, ‘Nothing is happening. I want to make a complaint and that’, it really does come back to you if you can show that you’ve at least made contact with them, ‘This is what I’ve done’, explain it, you should be right generally.

Regional station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 4 years with Victoria Police

Alongside the oft-cited need for information, it was clear that officers perceived that members of the public want to see that police are actively pursuing their case. This was variable, as one officer explained:

Some people won’t report crimes because they don’t think that we’ll worry about it or that we’ll care and there’s nothing we can do anyway, so you’ve got complacent victims. You’ve got the other end of the spectrum, you’ve got the victims that expect everything. They want to have crimes solved. They want the persons put in jail. They want all the property recovered. It’s hard finding that middle ground because we can’t do everything. We want to know everything that’s happening, we need to collate it and work out what’s going on, but we can’t solve every crime.

Outer urban station, Snr Sgt [Management]

One way in which victims of crime can be reassured that a case is being actively and adequately pursued is through the work carried out by dedicated Crime Desks. For those police working in Crime Desk roles it was recognised that the ‘performance’ of finger-printing and taking other physical evidence from a crime scene in relation to property crime, while not always necessary or useful to the investigation, serves to satisfy victims that the crime was being taken seriously. Furthermore, in the process the officer can also explain the realities of obtaining a conviction in the case of property crime, as a means of pre-empting any potential dissatisfaction were the case to be closed:

[The Crime Desk has been] a positive move from a victim’s sense ... because we do have the time. We’re not in a primary response unit so therefore our primary role is to go into these people’s houses, check out the crime scene, gather the evidence and submit the report to the detectives. Therefore, we do have that extra time to talk to the victim, listen to their concerns, talk to them about what’s going on, suggest some sort of crime prevention in better locks for their doors, canvass their neighbours, see if there were any witnesses, things like that. So we have the luxury of being able to do that adequately, rather than say the van who may have to get to the next job or the next domestic. They don’t have that luxury. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Crime Desk], 26 years with Victoria Police

Another officer in a station with a dedicated Crime Desk expressed similar sentiments:

A lot of it seems to be as long as they [victims] have that impression that something is being done, and the Crime Desk has said to me that often they will know that they’re not going to get anything but they do it anyway, e.g. dust for fingerprints, but if people see something being done, they tend to be more satisfied. Yes, as long as they see ... that we have completed the tasks that really you should be following up what’s occurred, then I think they would be happy. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [CIU], 26 years with Victoria Police

Crime Desks were thus reported as important in meeting the expectations of victims of crime, particularly in reassuring them that an investigation is in progress.

The least tangible and at times most frustrating issue raised by a number of police was the recognition that some victims of crime are seeking ‘justice’ and look to the police to ensure that justice is done. The following comments illustrate this point:

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I think they want to get the person charged, that’s their main priority. *Outer urban station, Const. (Uniform), 2 years with Victoria Police*

Justice. They don’t come here to report just for the fun of it. They want their slice of the pie. *Outer urban station, Sgt (Uniform), 12 years with Victoria Police*

I suppose at the end of the day they want to see that the system works, that justice is going to be done. *Outer urban station, Snr Const. (CIU), 10 years with Victoria Police*

For some police such expectations of justice were at odds with the reality of the justice system and the possible outcomes, and as such managing expectations, through communication, is seen as a critical aspect of their job. Indeed, many police are themselves deeply cynical about the criminal justice system and its potential to deliver justice (cf. Chan 2003: 229). Thus, some concern was expressed by officers that they might be held responsible for securing convictions from a court system about which they are themselves sceptical. Yet for many victims, ‘justice’ can mean something other than simply having the offender convicted, as proponents of restorative justice have long argued (Dignan 2007). The following example related by one officer offers a clear example of a victim for whom justice meant being included in the criminal justice process, rather than witnessing punishment:

I had one girl recently where she was a victim of a hit and run, and she was knocked off her motor scooter by a car and the car kept going, she was hurt fairly badly. [We] caught the bloke, interviewed him, processed [the case], [and it] went to court only last week. I kept her informed the whole way, she actually came to court on the contest, she didn’t have to come, but I gave her the opportunity and she said yes, I’ll take a day off and I’ll come to court. She sat there all day …. She doesn’t hold any grudge or anything she just wanted to be there to see how the justice system works that’s all. Also the lawyer, the defence lawyer for the defendant, said that he was apologetic and wanted to apologise to her after the court case, she said no, she didn’t want to do that. She didn’t want to accept an apology. She said if he got one year’s jail or four years’ jail, it wouldn’t make any difference. She doesn’t hate him, it wouldn’t make any difference to her what’s done. So she just wanted to see how the wheels of justice work that’s all. A bit of closure for her. *Urban station, Snr Const. (Uniform), 8 years with Victoria Police*

While undoubtedly many victims of crime are eager to see a case resolved through a conviction, as many police identified to us, the extent to which they seek formal punishment may be overstated. We are aware that for front-line officers who invest in the ‘crime-fighting’ operational style there may be a tendency to align their perceptions of the needs of victims of crime with what police believe is achievable and/or desirable, and therefore they may be prone to exaggeration regarding the extent to which victims they interact with actually seek criminal justice outcomes and punishments. However, this does not mean that victims may not be interested in the criminal justice process and our findings emphasise the importance of respecting and enabling the wishes of those victims of crime who seek to be informed and included wherever possible in the process.

6.3.4 Managing expectations

One of the difficulties in negotiating police–victim relationships that was consistently cited by participants was that of managing the high and often unrealistic expectations of police work held by some members of the public. As already alluded to, there are many interactions where victims of crime are satisfied with the explanations offered as to the limits of police process and the limits of possible outcomes. Nevertheless, participants referred to a minority of the general public, who often have had
few prior contacts with the police, who have extremely high expectations. The following quotes outline the sometimes difficult and unsatisfactory interactions that can result:

And some people come in, I don’t know if you can imagine the people we deal with sometimes. They’re extremely demanding and it’s over things, at times, where we just are never going to satisfy them. There’s nothing we could do that would satisfy these people. And the members get, they get stressed sometimes and so … they might be rude to them but it’s often the only language some people understand, too. *Regional station, Insp., 28 years with Victoria Police*

We get it every day, people come up, even in the watch house people come up to the counter, ‘This happened, that happened’, and ‘Why is that happening?’ and ‘Why is it happening to me, why haven’t you got 20 police around my house to watch this thing?’ and you just go, ‘We just haven’t’. You know you try and explain it to them to the best that you can but they just keep going on and on, and in the end you just, like I say you start out every sympathetic. I always try and treat people initially as I would like to be treated and then you just take the situation from there as it develops. *Urban station, Srn Const. [Uniform], 28 years with Victoria Police*

Another respondent was perhaps more candid in his assessment, noting that:

I’d say 99 per cent of victims are good but then you get the arseholes. I want it done now, I want this done, you do it for me or else …. Some [are] very demanding. *Urban station, Srn Const. [Crime Desk], 20 years with Victoria Police*

Some victims of crime were viewed as frustrating because the matter itself was seen as trivial and/or not clearly a crime, and also because some members of the public expect instant resolution from the police for messy, ambiguous situations. In this vein, one officer recalled:

I generally feel like they want unrealistic things. I suppose as a victim they feel hard done by so they just want to feel … better and … revenge isn’t the right word, but I feel like normally a victim, they’re hard done by, they’ve had the wrong thing done to them and they want the police to make that better, which we’re not able to …. I’d feel the same way. I feel like a lot of them … use the police to get back at the other person because obviously there’s so much we can do, we charge people really, which is a long process. I’m not really sure what it is they want us to do, and I find myself asking victims that a lot. If they’ve been dissatisfied, I’m like, ‘What do you expect from me? What do you think that I can do for you?’ And they’re like, ‘I don’t know’. But a lot of them, in more minor situations, it’s almost like they want to get back at the person more than anything. *Urban station, Srn Const. [Uniform], 4 years with Victoria Police*

It was identified, however, that the greatest misunderstandings more often occur when individual victims of crime hold unrealistic expectations of police resources, and the timeframes and likely outcomes of criminal investigations. The following comments suggest this is a reasonably frequent occurrence:

I think they expect the police to act on it straight away, they expect the accused to be convicted … and I think they expect, when they report it to police to be done straight away when that’s not realistic. *Outer urban station, Const. [Uniform], 2 years with Victoria Police*

I think some people do. I think some people expect you to be able to solve their problems straight away. So I think some people are unrealistic in what they expect you to do and I think a lot of people aren’t willing to help themselves and they expect you to solve the problem for
them without them having to do anything. Regional station, L. Snr Const. [Uniform], 30 years with Victoria Police

Unrealistic expectations are fuelled by media representations of policing that feature 100 per cent clear-up rates within a half-hour format, so it is not surprising that some members of the public hold such views. This influence of the media on public expectations was mentioned by numerous participants:

Like I think there are some victims who didn’t think that we are all super cops or we are CSI and they don’t understand that we might not have this thing solved in a week or we might not have the crook by the end of the day. Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 2 years with Victoria Police

I’d say it is because they see it on TV and think, not only on the speed of getting to court and that kind of thing, but their expectations on us as police for our investigation tool, they can see things on NCIS and CSI or whatever and think that we can go up to a whiteboard and pull pictures from here and there and look there’s a cigarette butt over there, you can get that and find out who did it by tomorrow type thing, so TV’s got a lot to answer for I think. Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 3 years with Victoria Police

Everyone watches cop shows and they expect that’s what we do, that’s exactly how we operate. Urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 4 years with Victoria Police

Some people can be unrealistic, a lot of the unrealistic expectations are generated from television and their beliefs that we can get DNA or fingerprints or some type of evidence from nothing because they’ve seen it on television and the result takes two weeks and why haven’t we got it you know or whatever. Urban station, Snr Const. [CIU], 5 years with Victoria Police

While the respondents generally blamed the media for exaggerated public perceptions of the speed and outcome of investigations, one officer did acknowledge that it was often difficult for the public to understand how a busy station operated in relation to rosters and the range of duties. He suggested:

Sometimes I don’t think we have the time to give these people what they deserve, the victims. From a public point of view, they don’t understand that. Obviously the public don’t realise how much work goes into what we have to do and how much time it takes. Perfect example: someone rang a while ago to say that there was some incident they’d reported to one of the members and they wanted to know what was going on and I looked and I said, ‘They’re on leave for the next three weeks or something’. They said, ‘Oh well who’s taking it over?’ No-one’s taking it over and they didn’t understand that. ‘So what, you people just go on leave?’, because it’s always ‘you people’ .... The public have no idea and that makes it hard because I think as a victim if it happened to me I would think, ‘Well that’s not fair. So for three weeks no-one’s even going to do anything about this? I was robbed, I was this, I was that’, and I think you would feel a little bit like you’re not getting any customer service from VicPol but there’s nothing else you can do about that. I’m sure I don’t want someone going on leave saying to me, ‘Oh can you handle this?’ ... but it’s hard with the public when they don’t understand. That’s not their fault; it’s just what happens. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 5 years with Victoria Police

Given the complexity and variety of police–victim interactions it is not remarkable that not all of these interactions are satisfactory for all parties involved. Nevertheless, these interactions can be managed to some extent. One officer, for example, was very clear about the importance of frankness in relaying the likely outcomes of investigations to the public:
Victims want somebody to listen to their story, they want somebody to take what they’re saying in and record all the information and they’re hoping for a positive outcome, obviously, but unfortunately sometimes that’s just not going to happen. Some of them have a very realistic understanding of that and some don’t. I try to be honest, just be honest with them and say, ‘Look, this is the probability of what may happen’. I think that’s probably the key, they just want honesty from you rather than some false hope that it’s all going to be solved today. Regional station, Const. [Uniform], 1 year with Victoria Police

Providing clear and unambiguous information about the investigative process and its outcomes is integral to managing public expectations that may be some distance from the reality of daily policing.

In summary, it should be noted that, while this section has considered problematic interactions, there are many more positive interactions between victims of crime and police across Victoria. In certain specialist areas (such as homicide) and in some regional areas, officers have ongoing, intermittent contacts with individual victims of crime that can extend over many years. Moreover, ‘victim-oriented’ and ‘pragmatic’ officers do view the police–victim interface as an essential aspect of police work. Such officers also find it rewarding to learn that their efforts are appreciated by the public and by their colleagues, as the following accounts reveal:

Someone had their purse stolen and their credit cards were used and sure we didn’t catch the offenders but she actually for Christmas gave me a small gift saying thanks for helping me out regarding this thing … you don’t expect it, but it’s nice to casually just to get that praise and people appreciate how you deal with things. Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 2 years with Victoria Police

Most stations that might get a letter or card of appreciation, most or almost most supervisors will grab the card, little email to the boss, or whack it in someone’s PDA. Urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 20 years with Victoria Police

The importance of police–victim interactions in enhancing public trust in policing was also highlighted in the interviews:

Well they’ll want to come back again, if a victim sees that their complaint was handled or that someone actually cares, they’ll want to call triple zero again, it might have a flow-on effect. Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 3 years with Victoria Police

They’d be happy to approach the police again to report what they might think is a menial crime, but if they get a good service, then they’ll be happy to go back. Outer urban station, Const. [Uniform], 3 years with Victoria Police

I guess the main thing would be if we don’t get it right, people would be hesitant to report again in the future and also to other people. It’s just word-of-mouth bad publicity and people will get it in their mind that our police aren’t going to do anything about it anyway, they’re not going to listen to me, they don’t believe me so I’m not going to bother reporting it. Outer urban station, Srn Const. [SOCAU]

It’s … word of mouth … so if someone has a good experience with the [police] they’re going to tell their friends … we also get some good press … from victims who deal with us, they’ve written letters of praise. Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 2 years with Victoria Police
The officers cited above are exemplary of the ‘victim-oriented’ officers discussed in Section 5. There are clearly pockets of excellence in Victoria Police where this interface is handled effectively.

6.4 Police as victims

A final issue that arose during the interviews was the recognition of police as victims. The research framework suggests that police are a separate group to victims, but a number of participants pointed to police as victims both while on the job and off duty. In part, much of the existing research in this area has tended to point towards the ‘emotional labour’ (Williams 2002; Ericson & Grove 2008) of police work and the way in which working with victims of crime can have an impact on police over the long term. As one experienced officer explained: ‘A lot of members have breakdowns over these serious incidents, a result of carrying the weight of the grieving relatives’ (Regional, Insp., 28 years with Victoria Police).

The emotional toll of police work on individual officers was often discussed in relation to attending scenes of child fatalities. Several participants who have served as police members for decades highlighted that the nature of many of the incidents police witness has a negative impact on both a personal and professional level:

We’re victims in some ways ourselves, you know, having to attend those sorts of incidents and trying to deal with it. Major regional station, Snr Const. [Uniform & Community Liaison officer], 17 years with Victoria Police

Stresses come sometimes from just what you’ve seen and dealt with and don’t ever leave you, never. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 34 years with Victoria Police

You come to work and you’re shaking and you don’t want to come to work, these sorts of things. [it’s like] you’ve got an emotional block-up, you just keep shoving stuff in and eventually it’s full. Regional station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 28 years with Victoria Police

Only a few participants spoke explicitly about serious difficulties they have faced in coping with their work, often triggered by one or a series of critical incidents.

I was a mess for a long time, probably still [am], I just couldn’t detach. [It was] very difficult. Very difficult. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 9 years with Victoria Police

Unfortunately I went through a stage where I got very sick and got flashbacks from everybody that I’d been to when I thought that I’d dealt with it excellently in the past. Regional station, Sgt [CIU], 22 years with Victoria Police

In addition to the personal, on-the-job experiences faced by individual police, it was reported that some stations had experienced major crimes and/or incidents which had impacted the station as a whole. These incidents were raised by the majority of the participants from those locations. Generally, these experiences were seen as bringing staff together within the station, while also having both short- and long-term negative impacts on individual staff. In some cases individuals at those stations reported ongoing and unaddressed issues with which they continued to struggle, but sensed that their problems were presumed by their colleagues to be in the past and/or that they ought to be coping as other members appeared to be coping. While this subject requires further research, these initial findings suggest that long-term strategies beyond crisis management need to be established, and that they should be tailored to individuals as much as possible.
However, the majority of participants spoke of their ability to cope with the personal tragedies they routinely encounter, both through black humour and ‘hardening’ themselves to the point where they believe themselves to be immune to emotional damage:

I don’t know if it’s a good or bad thing but you sort of become hardened. *Urban station, Snr Const. [Crime Desk], 9 years with Victoria Police*

Look, black humour gets you through it and the older people looking after the younger people, I’m a great believer in that. *Outer urban station, L. Snr Const. [Uniform], 39 years with Victoria Police*

I learnt very early on, you don’t personalise it, you don’t look at that person and say, ‘that could have been my mother, that could be my aunt and uncle’, you know what I mean. You never go there. *Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 8 years with Victoria Police*

So whilst it’s certainly upsetting, there’s no question. But I just, I sort of shut down and think, well I don’t know these people, it’s tragic for these people, but it doesn’t need to affect me. As I said, it would be very different if they were a family you cared for. *Outer urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 12 years with Victoria Police*

Discussion of facing such trauma while on the job included specific tasks such as the delivery of death notices, where police who had some experience spoke about the aspects of the job that are best dealt with through detachment:

the longer you work in this job you tend to be a little cold, and not cold as in: you’re not blunt with anybody when you’re delivering a death message, but you tend to just switch off, and I guess you go a little bit robotic. *Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 7 years with Victoria Police*

Rather than seeking out formal support structures, police identified talking to fellow officers and ‘switching off’ their emotions when on duty as their key coping strategies. Indeed, as discussed below, the formal support mechanisms in place at Victoria Police received mixed reviews by the participants. Before turning to discussion of these support mechanisms, we note that a handful of police referred to the physical and psychological impact of assaults they experienced while in uniform, even in cases where the assault was a consequence of intervention (for example, breaking up a fight) rather than an intentional, targeted attack on police (for example, individual’s specifically targeting police and attacking them). Some officers raised this as an issue that is not addressed by the organisation unless it results in serious injury. That is, they felt that there are ‘ideal’ victims within the organisation, that is officers who witnesses extremely traumatic or serious events and or who suffer significant injury. As a consequence, those who experience ‘lesser’ traumas in the workplace who effectively are ‘non-ideal’ victims (for example, they may be verbally abused or physically accosted without injury) may be ignored and/or ineligible for support services and potentially perceive their response (such as stress, not coping, emotional upset, fear) as inappropriate and/or invalid. This report cannot comment on the extent to which this occurs, however the findings do points to broader concerns about the validity of the assumptions governing when police members should access the support processes and the need for further investigation and review in this area..
6.4.1 Formal supports

Many participants spoke about a change in police culture over the past 5–10 years regarding the formal management of police as victims, and of being aware of the emotional toll of police work. As one officer reflected:

I mean if you went to a murder or a fatal [when I started] … the response was, ‘go and have a beer son, see you later’, and you go down the pub and you get shit-faced. Now it’s a totally different response … So it’s down the other side of the peer support, sit down, debrief, discussions, welfares … sick leave, it’s all catered for now. *Outer urban station, Snr Sgt [Management], 37 years with Victoria Police*

Generally it was reported that there is no negative stigma attached to the support processes that are in place – an email following a critical incident and access to counselling at any time. However, two findings are worth noting here. The first is that over half of those interviewed said they had not, and probably would not, utilise these services. This is not necessarily indicative of the service failing to meet the needs of officers, but rather reflects a tendency within this group to ‘deal with things’ in their own way – going home, talking to their partner, exercising. However, such a finding does not undermine nor nullify Victoria Police’s commitment to the welfare of officers, driven by an understanding of the impact of stress and trauma exacerbated over long periods of time. Rather the findings suggest that this needs to be in place but the management and delivery requires further review. The importance of addressing welfare issues is compounded by the second finding: that many participants expressed dissatisfaction with the current system of contact whereby the officer receives an email following a critical incident.

Participants made comments such as the following:

I think unfortunately their officers are so lacking in staff, it’s a bit sad that you just get an email from them. *Outer urban station, Snr Const. [CIU], 5 years with Victoria Police*

This post-event email was most often seen as a very impersonal form of contact. It was clear that in different stations the atmosphere and connection between members varied, and in some locations specific incidents had been dealt with as a group – for example, bushfires, major road incidents and other major crimes which had impacted a whole station were dealt with primarily through talking with colleagues:

I think that’s probably the best thing, is talking about it with your mates. And that’s sort of a therapy in a way, in a sense. Yeah, most jobs, you just talk about it, and that’s the way you get off anything that’s on your chest, you just get it out there and breathe easy, I think. *Urban station, Const. [Uniform], 1 year with Victoria Police*

Around 50 per cent of participants did not feel the need to comment in great detail on these issues, but those who did expressed a range of responses that in part reflect different personality types and responses to their experiences and roles within Victoria Police. Some concerns raised included the need for longer term follow-up – that is, not just immediately post-event – and the importance of senior staff keeping a personal check on those under their command:

But do you reckon there’s been any follow-up from a major incident like that five years down the track? ‘We’d better go back and speak to the people involved and see where they’re at’. Doesn’t happen. *Major regional station, Snr Const. [CIU], 17 years with Victoria Police*
My partner’s been involved in some things that he still talks about and he said, it would be really nice if the boss came up to him once in a while and said, ‘how are you coping?’.

Outer urban station, Const. [Uniform], 2 years with Victoria Police

While it is clear that the majority of crimes will not generally impact police wellbeing, the short- and long-term impacts of dealing with some serious events can have major consequences. How these issues are currently addressed warrants further investigation.

6.5 Summary

This section has provided a broad and necessarily generalised account of the multitude of interactions with victims of crime and how police perceive these interactions and victims of crime. Below is a summary of the main points presented in this section.

1. Front-line police in the course of their duties categorise members of the public who present as victims of crime into two broad groups: ‘ideal’ victims and ‘non-ideal’ victims. ‘Ideal’ victims are generally perceived as vulnerable, blameless and respectable, reflecting ideas held by the broader society about what constitutes victimhood. Police also identify a larger group of ‘non-ideal’ victims whose claim to victim status is more fragile and suspect. This contains a number of subgroups: those who are regarded as culpable for their victimisation; victims of crime primarily interested in potentially fraudulent financial gain, either through compensation or insurance; uncooperative victims who withdraw or otherwise impede police investigations; and victims of crime whose cases are viewed as trivial and/or who attempt to embroil police in interpersonal or neighbourhood conflicts.

2. The mobilisation of these categories by police does not necessarily impact baseline service delivery. It does, however, impact the delivery of support above and beyond standard Charter requirements, which is frequently accorded to ‘ideal’ victims.

3. Dealing with victimisation in lower socioeconomic areas is complicated by negative relations between police and some members of these communities, particularly those already known to police as offenders. Ironically these areas are also viewed as producing many calls upon police service, including claims of victimisation that are seen by police members to be based in trivial, interpersonal altercations.

4. Dealing with multicultural communities presents many challenges for front-line police. Cultural values and dispositions towards the police ranging from reticence to hostility are viewed as making investigations complex and difficult to complete. Officers often feel poorly prepared, particularly in relation to interacting with newly established migrant communities.

5. In assessing the needs of victims of crime, participants expressed their awareness that the severity of impact is not necessarily related to crime type, although crimes against the person were viewed as especially serious. This observation is particularly relevant to burglary, which it was noted can often have a significant emotional and material impact upon specific victims.

6. In assessing victims’ needs, the observations of some participants were consistent with the findings of previous research. This was especially so in relation to ‘bedside manner’ – listening to victims of crime, treating their cases as important and displaying empathy.
7. The provision of information and keeping victims updated on the progress of cases were acknowledged as important, if not universally practised.

8. The provision of clear explanations of what will occur following a victim’s first contact with police is particularly important in defining and managing victim expectations.

9. Crime Desks were reported as satisfying victim expectations, as they provide reassurance that police are investigating the crime and that their case is being treated with respect.

10. There are a minority of victims of crime who hold unrealistic perceptions of police resources, investigation duration and likely outcomes.

11. The email contact system in relation to post-traumatic event follow-up was widely regarded as impersonal and insufficient.

6.6 Recommendations

This section has covered a number of matters related to issues of police culture and operational styles, which were addressed in the recommendations of Section 5. However, there are some specific recommendations that can be made in relation to this section. These are:

1. **Inclusion of property crime in current victim procedures**

   Property crime, particularly household burglary, is a significant crime event for many victims of crime and can have significant ramifications for individuals, both emotional and material. There are sound arguments therefore for including burglary victims and other victims of property crime within the categories of victims who currently can request ongoing information from police in relation to their case via the L1 form. While only a small proportion of victims of property crime are likely to request this, this would acknowledge the diverse way in which crime is experienced without defining victimisation solely in terms of crimes against the person.

2. **Department of Justice/Victoria Police working party on victims of property crime**

   Victims of property crime are currently poorly serviced within the victims’ services landscape in Australia. We recommend that a working party be established to facilitate the integration of property crime as a relevant category within existing support mechanisms and/or to shift the current provisions of the service model to focus on individual need rather than crime type as the beginning point for determining the provision of support. This will require liaison between the relevant government agencies to assess to whom such referrals might be made.

3. **Victoria Police–multicultural community knowledge exchange programs**

   It is clear that policing multicultural communities was viewed by participants as a significant challenge for many front-line officers. For some it was perceived as overwhelming. A clear finding from our research is that officers in some stations desire greater cultural knowledge, particularly in relation to newly established multicultural communities. Officers also expressed the view that police procedure is not understood, or is incorrectly interpreted, by some multicultural communities. It would therefore be desirable to facilitate ‘knowledge exchange’ between front-line officers and multicultural communities wherever possible. Rather than a unidirectional dialogue in which police receive cultural awareness, such exchanges should allow police to express the difficulties they are experiencing and workshop possible solutions with the
community in question. They would also facilitate greater knowledge of the values and culture of specific multicultural communities. Ideally, such exchanges should be relatively informal and would involve specific communities relevant to the area policed.

4. Evaluation of Crime Desks

Crime Desks were reported in glowing terms, particularly in relation to their perceived outcomes in relation to victim satisfaction. It would be advisable to undertake a victim satisfaction survey in relation to Crime Desks to empirically test the validity of these claims. Should this prove accurate, Crime Desks might be more widely distributed.

5. Police victimisation and staff welfare: review of police welfare mechanisms

The current email notification system post a critical incident is not seen as effective. Participants reported that it is impersonal, inefficient and provided only in some instances, without recognising that at times smaller incidents may also have negative impacts on officers. This system should therefore be reviewed. It was also noted that front-line supervisors are integral in intervening where officers experience difficulties due to work-related emotional stress. The extent to which participants reported working in an environment that is supportive of recognising and responding to work-related stress and trauma varied considerably across the state: some participants reported that this is actively discouraged and/or that they would never report this, while others reported that their supervisors were supportive and encouraging of officers identifying and responding to work-related stress. Front-line supervisors should therefore receive appropriate training in recognising the symptoms of trauma among their staff and ways to assist in the support and management of this.
7.0 Supporting victims: police engagement with external agencies

One focus of this research was the examination of models of victim support and the mapping of current practices and protocols in operation in police stations across Victoria\(^7\). This is critical to this research because in Victoria, and indeed across Australia, the role of police in terms of victim support is largely focused on the provision of timely and appropriate information to victims of crime through the ‘referral’ model of victim support (Wilson & Segrave forthcoming). This is embodied within the Victims’ Charter Act (s. 7a-b), which stipulates that investigatory agencies and victim services are required ‘to provide clear, timely and consistent information about relevant support services’ (s. 7a), and ‘if appropriate, are to refer persons adversely affected by crime to relevant support services’ (s. 7b). This mandate refers specifically to victims of crimes against the person. However, Victoria Police meets this requirement in relation to all victims of crime, through the mandatory provision of a formal crime report to all victims when a crime is reported. For victims of crimes against the person, this involves the L1 form (which provides information about the reported crime, the police informant and the Victims of Crime Helpline contact number), and the recommended provision of the Victims’ Guide to Support Services and the Criminal Justice System, a 63-page booklet published by the Victims Support Agency (within the Victorian Department of Justice). In this way, external agencies play a central role in the provision of support to victims. This research in part therefore sought to examine the referral process by asking police open-ended questions about the provision of victim support and about the agencies (both government and local non-government) of which they are aware of and with which they work.

This component of our research explored police engagement with support agencies by focusing on two key issues. The first is the extent of police awareness of victim support agencies – at the local, regional and state level – looking at participants’ general awareness of the services available. We did not ask police about the referral process, but instead asked whether there was a process in place and what processes they followed when working with victims of crime. Second, we examined police interaction with other agencies in relation to victim support. This component was attentive to police experiences of interactions with external support agencies, where we wanted to know less about formal processes and more about the day-to-day interaction with other agencies. We present the findings from these two areas of investigation below, and provide recommendations pertaining to police awareness of and interactions with such agencies.

While Victoria Police operates according to a referral model, our findings reveal that on a daily basis police are negotiating the extent to which a referral is sufficient for the victims of crime they encounter. Our findings also highlight the importance of inter-agency partnerships in the work of Victoria Police across the state, both in relation to victim support and to meeting obligations under the Victims’ Charter, but also more generally in connection to the pressures on police to provide services and support above and beyond the official requirements of police, particularly in regional Victoria.

\(^7\) We note that this research was undertaken prior to the piloting of the Supportlink victim referral service. These findings remain valid and useful both as background to the trialling of this new service and as a reflection of current practice across the state.
7.1 Awareness of services

The level of awareness among police of local support services and points of referral within Victoria Police (such as the VAU), as well as state-wide accessible services such as the Victorian Victims of Crime Helpline and Lifeline, varied both between and within stations. At the outset it is worth noting that participants most often alluded to the Victims of Crime Helpline as the main point of referral. Furthermore, in identifying local services, participants’ knowledge was mostly of specialist services for family violence and sexual assault, rather than more generalist services in their local area. This finding reflects the specific protocols to which Victoria Police members must adhere when dealing with these two crime types, which mandate processes involving direct police–support agency interaction. Commonly, interview responses echoed the following account:

[O]ur family violence [cases] go to [a local agency] ... and then they make contact with the victim.

Interviewer: Are there any other support groups, apart from for domestic violence?

Look, there’s the Victims of Crime, there’s a brochure or a package that we give to them, it’s got all the information hotline numbers and info, 24 hours a day they can contact somebody in relation to what’s happened to them. Regional station, Const. [Uniform], 1 year with Victoria Police

However, many participants working in general duties positions (for example, ‘on the van’ or at the service desk) were unaware of specific victim support services, beyond the information included in the required L1 form and/or the victims handbook with general contact numbers, leaving it up to victims to make contact on a needs basis. The comment below is exemplary here:

Victims of crime cards that we usually have, we can give them. Support services, the nearest number’s on them. So, if they can’t get in contact with us or they feel more comfortable going to see someone for counselling, then we give them that option and also the phone numbers. Regional station, Snr Const. [Uniform] 9 years with Victoria Police

It is important to note, as we explored in Section Five, that discussions regarding victim support services overlapped with the identification of the police role in the provision of support. A number of police officers articulated their interpretation of the role of police as one of referring victims to support services through the Helpline and the booklet, and expressed their satisfaction with the current process for providing information. For example:

There’s no doubt those new books [the Victim’s Handbook] that have come out are going to be terrific ... I’ve given out a few. I think that probably covers a lot of it. If people want to take things further then they’ve got the ability to read that and while the crime is still in the forefront of their mind ... [it’s] a good tool to have. Remote station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 24 years with Victoria Police

While a key observation is that participants tended to have limited knowledge of specific points of referral, this is not necessarily problematic; yet some participants did raise concerns about this. Police participants consistently expressed their concern and frustration with their limited knowledge of available services and the difficulty of accessing information on extant services:

It gets confusing ... which one do you send [them] to, which support agency? Regional station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 8 years with Victoria Police
There’s so many [agencies], I didn’t know … until I started, you flick through some of these websites … for different organisations and there’s something for everything, there’s heaps of stuff [but] … it’s all here, there and everywhere. Outer urban station, L. Snr Const. [Family Violence], 21 years with Victoria Police

I attended a fatal where I had no idea who was going to be responsible for the counselling for the victims basically, and I just started trying to find someone to ring to find out about it. Major regional station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 8 years with Victoria Police

So it just gets really confusing, not only for the victims but for us, as to where do we send you …. So it gets embarrassing, and I tend to not do it, because I tend to try and solve the problem myself, or I’ll send them to DHS [Department of Human Services], which I know is still there. Because it just gets too confusing for everybody. Outer urban station, L. Snr Const. [Uniform], 21 years with Victoria Police

It just depends on what the nature of the crime is. There’s a whole lot of support networks, probably too many in some respects because people get very confused. Depending on what the circumstance is as to where you refer them. Even sometimes local council can be of assistance too. It really just depends on the nature of what’s happened and what’s appropriate for them to be referred to. Outer urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 24 years with Victoria Police

The concerns outlined in the excerpts above reflect the range of issues raised by participants: confusion about where to access information, lacking knowledge in the early stages of their careers regarding where to seek help and how to provide help to victims, and the diverse nature of victim experiences and victim needs that police encounter. Individual instances of victimisation are often intertwined with a complex constellation of needs, which necessitates that police have knowledge of a wide range of services.

A common concern was the lack of an up-to-date, comprehensive list of local services to which police could refer in cases where they felt more personalised or individualised information was required. Throughout the research, the diversity of victims’ needs was emphasised by police, and this was reflected in the identification of the range of services required by victims. Many participants expressed the view that the type of services required depended on the type of crime/victimisation, ranging from grief counselling, to alternative accommodation, to childcare, to crime prevention advice. One officer talked about recently settled migrant communities, for whom he was unsure of which services would be appropriate:

[with] the new people coming [here] … from Africa, the Sudanese and the Congolese … I’d like to [have] some contacts and just say, ‘Well, do you mind if I ring you now and again if I’ve got a need for you to help me with a victim or someone else that…?’ … And I know they’re there. But … a lot of us don’t know. So, but you do go hunting at times where you do need to get in contact with people, through the council, the ethnic council or the city council, you can find out who they are, if you want to. Regional station, SC [Uniform]

As expressed in the above comment, the police participants were of the view that while for the majority of victims a referral will suffice, there are certain situations where police feel they want to, and should be able to, refer individuals to services directly, rather than simply providing the contact details of support agencies. For some, the inability to do so made them feel unprofessional and/or that they had somehow failed in their duty, and a proportion of these members undertook individual efforts to investigate
available services, in some cases (as discussed in Section 5.2) assisting victims to access the service. At times, then, identifying services and linking victims to them increased police workload, as they personally took responsibility for locating an appropriate service to address the needs of individual victims.

Two main issues emerged from the interviews in relation to support services: the diverse needs of various groups within the community (addressed in Section 6.6), and how to identify the appropriate agencies and/or individuals within them to assist victims. The solution most often proposed to address both issues was to establish a clear point of reference and an up-to-date information source to assist with all of the issues faced by police in relation to victim support – not only victimisation but other welfare and support issues also:

There’s so many agencies now, we really need a one-stop shop. Outer urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 34 years with Victoria Police

It gets confusing ... which [agency] do you send [a victim] to ... it would be good to have one agency that dealt with the whole thing, whether it be homelessness, victims, violence, whatever, they all dealt with the one thing, it would be a lot easier. Regional station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 8 years with Victoria Police

There needs to be ... a liaison person [or] a referrals type system to refer them to ... same as like a domestic violence case. Outer urban station, Const. [Uniform], 2 years with Victoria Police

I’d like to think that there is like a main body. When you go to get somebody help, everything is so disjointed. I would really like to think that here’s System A. You go to them and they’ll help you with all the other stuff. They’ll refer you off for emergency accommodation for drug and alcohol, for food, for medical, that they’ve got all those resources. That there’s someone there that’s almost like a case manager. Urban station, Snr Const. [CIU], 8 years with Victoria Police

Over the years what I’ve seen is [that] ... we haven’t seemed to be able to get [victim services and information] all into one place, one basket. The shires have a lot of control over what sort of services are available, the state government then has a lot of [control], and then you’ve got the Australian Government. So it just gets really confusing, not only for the victims but for us, as to where do we send you. And then that organisation, we might start sending people there, but they’ll lose their funding in a year ... and we’re ... still [sending] them there and then they’re ringing us saying, ‘well they don’t exist’ ... it just gets too confusing for everybody. If we had one place that we contact, no matter how many different agencies there are out there. Outer urban station, L. Snr Const. [Uniform], 21 years with Victoria Police

One challenge consistently identified by participants was how to keep up with agency name changes and the details of the services they provide. In this regard, few officers have the time to search for information and/or any means of accessing updated information, as reflected in the following comments of two participants from regional stations:

Look, I know there’s a lot of services out there, I know there’s a lot of funding for different services ... [but] look there’s probably triple the amount of agencies in Shepparton but I wouldn’t even have a clue about [them] really. And this is something that we’ve spoken about here, about having a regular updated list of different services and keeping on top of that. But it’s just one of those things that we sort of push away and we don’t get time to do it, to focus on.
I know [some of] ... the agencies available, but really, it’s the tip of the iceberg ... [the] names of these welfare and support agencies change all the time and it catches me by surprise, and I’m sure it catches [up] everyone [because] we don’t know that they’re there or they’ve changed their name or their focus or agenda or whatever it is. Regional station, Sgt [Uniform] 21 years with Victoria Police

[Our town] is one of those places that does have so many services available but yet no one quite knows what services are available for what. Like even the other day I came across another service that I didn’t even know [about]. Major regional station, Snr Const. [SOCAU], 10 years with Victoria Police

Overall, it was common across all station types for participants to recognise that they had a limited level of knowledge of specific services. Yet this was not necessarily seen as a knowledge deficit. As already noted (see Section 5), the majority of those interviewed were not of the view that police require more detailed knowledge, instead believing that a point of referral, most often via written information, was sufficient. A critical issue for this research, however, is to note those services that police readily identified as organisations they engage with and knew about, before exploring in greater detail their experiences in working with such agencies.

Some stations proved the exception – via the leadership team or a proactive liaison officer – as they were well informed about a particular service or group of local services, and/or had an up-to-date, comprehensive source of information about local services that was readily accessible and utilised frequently. Thus, within Victoria Police pockets of exemplary practice and knowledge in relation to liaising with support services already exist. In some cases members of specialised units identified the need for Uniform personnel to be aware of certain agencies:

[One local agency has] ... just started to bolster their profile a little bit more and I’ve met with the manager there to try to get the Uniform to know about [their agency] and the programs there. Major regional station, Sgt [SOCAU], 18 years with Victoria Police

The relationship between police and support agencies worked best in stations where there was a known, active member undertaking this work. In this regard, we found that the role, and responsibility, of liaison officers varies. In one case the Youth Liaison Officer was well known around the station, and proactive in generating relationships with external agencies including the provision of support to young people, yet this was not so in other stations.

We also found that these relationships and interactions are not static, but form part of an ongoing process of change. As one experienced officer observed, there has been significant change both in terms of police efforts to connect victims with services, and agencies proactively informing police agencies about the services they provide:

I think [police are] getting better [at knowing who to refer people to and] I think there’s more organisations realising that [they] ... have got to go to the police to tell us what they can do for us, for the victims. Over the years it’s been hit and miss sort of thing. Outer urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 31 years with Victoria Police

7.1.1 Specific services: Victoria Police Victims Advisory Unit and external services

While the VAU is a specialist unit, with a remit to provide specialist advice on a case-by-case basis in relation to serious crimes and to refer police who require information or assistance in working with
victims, the research did not explicitly explore the extent to which participants were aware of the VAU or its role.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that no participant identified the VAU as a resource for information for police trying to assist victims, or as a referral point for victims. While approximately one quarter of participants indicated that they had some knowledge of the VAU, very few were aware of the unit’s role and purpose. Approximately eight participants communicated that they had contacted the VAU (Urban station, Sgt [CIU], 9 years with Victoria Police), and in these cases it was to seek specific advice regarding how to assist a victim of crime.

Police predominantly referred not to the VAU but to the Victorian Victims of Crime Helpline as the service to which they refer victims. In some cases police identified a specific local agency that acted as a primary resource for all referrals but, as we discuss below, there was significant variation across the state in relation to police awareness of services, their willingness to engage with these services and the extent to which police viewed external agencies as being able to assist them in providing better service and support to crime victims.

7.1.2 Types of services

Reflecting the findings on the emphasis on victims’ needs (see Section 6), the discussion of services for victims frequently brought to mind trauma and welfare support services.

However, it was noted by those working in general duties, and those working in specific roles such as on the Crime Desk, that victim support may also be interpreted as victim prevention, whereby victim support is framed in terms of educating the public on measures to prevent victimisation occurring or to avert repeat victimisation, particularly in relation to property crime. As one Crime Desk officer explained, the specific remit and focus of the unit means that victim support is more often conceptualised in terms of crime prevention rather than welfare: ‘I guess our port of call really is Irene at – she’s part of the crime prevention people up at Headquarters there. We link into her for all on services and things’ (Regional station, Sgt [Crime Desk] 21 years with Victoria Police). What was notable about this interview was that this member, and other members of the same group, knew the point of referral by name. In this case it was within Victoria Police, via the Safer Communities Unit.

However, while police generally did not engage extensively with external services, it was evident that many police – at least a quarter – identified that it would be useful to have more readily available contact information and, in some cases, to be able to receive feedback on whether victims had accessed a service following police contact, and if so whether they found it useful. These ideas are evident in the comments offered below by police from regional and metropolitan stations:

We just don’t have the room here to display brochures and there’s so many agencies now, we really need a one-stop shop. *Outer urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 34 years with Victoria Police*

I would probably say that there should be outside agencies that come in and perhaps deal with victims once we have done what we need to do. *Outer urban station, Sgt [Crime Desk], 20 years with Victoria Police*

It would be nice to actually know what they’ve done or what [it involved]. Like even an external agency to send you an email saying such and such came and saw me, it doesn’t have to go into details, obviously there’s confidentiality with counselling ... but just to say they came and saw me...
on this date, and then at least you know when you speak to your victim. Urban station, Sgt [CIU], 9 years with Victoria Police

While there may be a myriad of community services available, this does not translate into easily accessible information. Communication between police and external agencies is erratic at best, and this is certainly an area in which there is room for significant improvement in current practice by all parties involved.

In some stations we saw evidence of efforts to provide the information these participants were identifying as potentially useful in supporting victims of crime, via a hard-copy, updated reference book at the front counter, for example. We note, however, that such calls for more and/or better information about and ease of access to local services were not consistently expressed among the participants. While over half of those interviewed indicated that in some cases they assist victims beyond provision of the standard victim referral information, a large majority felt that this referral role was the limit of their responsibility. In identifying opportunities for addressing the call for greater information made by a subsection of the participant group, the goal should be to support police to provide this service at their discretion in a timely and efficient way, rather than to establish a process that creates an expectation that all police should do this. It is clear, as discussed in Section 6 in relation to victims’ needs, that the extent to which police are able to provide more direct assistance to victims varies, and it is therefore important that police discretion be maintained in this area.

7.2 Interaction with agencies

The findings regarding the agencies with which police engage to support victims of crime reflected the general finding that police tend to view their role as quite separate to the victim support role provided by external agencies, with the exception of family violence and sexual assault where there are formal agreements and processes in place between Victoria Police and external agencies (for example, with Centres Against Sexual Assault relating to case management). However, the discussion of police interaction with government agencies (DHS in particular) was distinct from the consideration of interaction with non-government support agencies. A significant proportion of participants raised issues in relation to government agencies, highlighting this as an area where police are frequently providing services to victims of crime that they perceive to be beyond their remit (and within the remit of these same government agencies). In contrast, the discussions in relation to interaction with local services tended to focus on opportunities to enhance victim support provision.

7.2.1 Government agencies

For many of the participants, the opportunity to put forward their perspectives on their interactions with other agencies was an invitation to identify the challenges and frustrations they face in their daily work. We have drawn on a wide range of interview excerpts here to reflect the consistency with which these issues were raised, particularly within regional stations. For police working with specific crime types, such as domestic violence (for example, in the Family Violence Units) and sexual assault, as well as for general duties officers in Uniform, the concerns raised around police–agency interaction centred on police being called to undertake work they felt was the responsibility of other agencies. This issue was particularly apparent in regional locations, where after-hours services were often lacking. This was frequently expressed as frustration over police time being used for ‘non-police’ and indirect victim work, as the comments below demonstrate:
I don’t think [psychiatric services] works well anywhere. [It takes so much] time... for us to deal with a person with a mental illness and try and get them to the service where they need to be.... [W]e might be at an incident where, say, an ambulance is called. Hypothetically, an ambulance might call us to an incident because it’s dangerous [and] they won’t [attend] until we go and clear [the situation]. The CAT [Crisis Assessment Team] won’t go until we go and make it safe and we deal with a person with a mental illness [but] we’re not doctors, so we have to treat the person as best we can...– it might resort to us having to restrain them or do whatever, to make the situation safe for the medical people to treat them. Yeah, look, it’s difficult. Regional station, Insp., 28 years with Victoria Police

I have now refused to go. If it’s DHS, if it’s clearly in their role, I just say, ‘No, I’m not going’, [laughs] ... I just refuse anymore ‘cause they’ve just done the dirty on me so many times. Regional station, Snr Const. [SOCAU], 21 years with Victoria Police

Oh, after five o’clock on a Friday, there’s no other services around, you know. You get DHS ringing up, you know. Suddenly, ‘Oh, it’s after hours. We’d better get the police; tell the police about it. We’ve known about this all day but, ooh, knock-off time. Let’s get on to the police now. It’s their problem’. So with kids that take off from like foster care, you know, that’s another big thing we take a lot of time with. Regional station, Const. [Uniform], 3 years with Victoria Police

We have trouble getting DHS out here to do child protection stuff on the weekends. They’re so underfunded and overstretched it’s ridiculous. Outer urban station, Snr Sgt [Management], 36 years with Victoria Police

DHS is ... the biggest disgrace going around ... Just because you know if you’re dealing with kids or anything like that who are not necessarily victims [but] ... something’s happened to mum or dad, or mum or dad are involved in something, then the kids are sort of like the offshoot victims ... then you just can’t get hold of them. They’re just so hard to deal with, they’ve only got a couple of people on in this half of the state or whatever, and you can end up babysitting kids for three hours. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 6 years with Victoria Police

When discussing government agencies, participants often raised concerns over the delineation between the police role and the role of these external services. In many cases police indicated that they felt they were providing a service where there was a gap in service provision from other agencies. Based on this, a number of police articulated the need for a victim service that could fill this gap – that would recognise the limits of the referral model in some circumstances where immediate intervention and support is required, but which also could avoid cases simply being passed onto DHS. This need was most frequently identified in relation to the provision of welfare and trauma assistance, often described as the ‘social work’ component of victim support that few police felt was part of their job:

I think victim maintenance is definitely aligned with police work but it’s definitely from my view at least a social work aspect and for that reason is better handled by another entity for the heavy lifting associated with making sure that people are looked after. Regional station, Sgt [Prosecution], 15 years with Victoria Police

Probably a better thing for victims would be probably more contact with support services on the spot, like crisis accommodation or anything like that because you do get some that go, ‘I’ve got nowhere to go’, but it would be nice to be able to have someone that you could ring and get something immediately or get some assistance, [so we’re] not hanging around while they’re
trying to sort something [because] … you’ve got to babysit [them]. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 6 years with Victoria Police

It can be frustrating for police who can identify the need for support, who are unable to provide it themselves and who do not feel that the agencies in place will be able to provide what is required for vulnerable individuals and groups. As one participant explained:

DHS … their responsibility in certain areas is to look after kids. You might have a child who is a victim and you think that they probably need a bit more help than they do [but DHS are] … limited by their staff [and] … what they can do …. [A] lot of the times you ring them for help and it takes a while to hear back from them or you can see the writing’s on the wall of what should be done … but you can’t do it and it’s under their control and you don’t see it getting done. Outer urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 31 years with Victoria Police

Such concerns highlight the issue of victims’ immediate needs, which referral to the Victims of Crime Helpline, for example, cannot address. They also point to the ways in which police are often the only agency able to fill in the gaps in service provision. Participants identified support for children and the improvement of support agency–police interaction after hours as key areas for reform across the state.

7.2.2 Non-government agencies

The diverse roles of the police who participated in this research were reflected in the range of their responses to questions regarding knowledge of, and engagement with, external agencies. The comments above are indicative of police members’ understandings of the limits of their role and the demarcation of state-funded agency responsibilities. For many police, DHS was a constant source of frustration, primarily because of its office-hour operation, despite having a population and needs basis that requires support 24-hours, seven days a week.

With regards to external non-government organisations, there were reports of positive interactions and attempts to build those relationships, in recognition that better interaction would also assist police to perform their work more efficiently and effectively. One sergeant commented that most members at the station were not aware of the local services available, yet he was committed to building a quick reference database to address this:

If someone came to us, we’ve got next door the people who provide the soup van … for the homeless. Also, the people that have been placed into government housing, they’ll also assist with getting them clothing, furniture. So we’ve got a good relationship with them. There’s a … women’s hostel services … depending on … if they’re Aboriginal, then they might go over to this centre or if they’re victims of family violence then they’ll be at this centre and if they’re just generally homeless well then there’s another area. So it’s about getting to know what suits the individual that you’re dealing with at the time …. I’m just starting to do [that] now around [this area] … they’ve got some fantastic services but if the members aren’t aware they … won’t direct them that way …. [W]e’re in the process now [of making] … some little quick reference cards … [so] the information is there. Urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 20 years with Victoria Police

A key finding of this report is that there are some police–agency partnerships that currently work extremely well in Victoria. These effective partnerships are most often negotiated within specific contexts. It is also clear that these partnerships are often the result of the work of proactive individuals – police or community agency workers, or both – who have independently led innovation and raised awareness in
this area. For example, one officer reflected on how both the level of police–victim support agency interaction and the quality of that interaction had improved when two key people were driving this communication:

> We could have five Angelas [local support worker] and there’d be enough work because she does our witness service assistance too. [There is a service] in Melbourne but they’re so far [away] she will pick up that [role as well]. So for a sexual assault she will sit with the victims and support them .... [There] used to be a ... senior sergeant here [who] would of a morning have a look at the crime against the person [reports]. He’d make a referral by email to Angela and she would pick that up. [He’s] gone now and we’ve lost it a little bit ... that [indirect and immediate] referral. 

Major regional station, Sgt [SOCAU], 18 years with Victoria Police

In the same location the local support service had addressed read-outs a number of times, and while it was acknowledged that not all members attend read-outs, the participant commented that this remained an effective way to communicate information to members, as ‘what’s said at the read-out is also emailed [out to personnel], and most people look at that because there could be something that might be important’ (Major regional station, Snr Const. [SOCAU], 10 years with Victoria Police). Those who recognised the importance of building these relationships also understood that it takes time and leadership to build and maintain them – something that the leadership or those in specialist roles are better positioned to do than are Uniform members.

Our research findings indicate that the needs of individual communities, the demands on police and the infrastructure within communities across Victoria all differ substantially. Thus, the findings point to key areas for improvement that will likely be achievable to varying degrees across the state.

7.3 Comparing practice: victim support in different locations

As noted above, significant discrepancies were identified in relation to police and state agency roles among stations located in regional Victoria. There are key infrastructure challenges facing stations outside metropolitan and large regional areas due to specific services being unavailable and/or very slow to arrive, and given the often substantial geographic distances involved. As one Uniform officer explained, the location of the station impacts both the needs of victims and the provision of support:

> [It takes] hours [for other agencies to come] ... I understand they can jump on the nearest plane but that’s still going to take time and you want something there and then, that’s the thing .... Being so remote, we have to try and use local resources initially and then go from there really. 

Major regional station, L. Snr Const. [Uniform], 4 years with Victoria Police

As the above comment reveals, in regional and rural locations both the provision of services and accessing services for victims by necessity differs. Two officers similarly recognised:

> In the country I just think that the onus would be more on them to go chasing those services to come to the city and make themselves available. Horsham is nearly three and a half hours away, it’s nearly 400 kilometres and would people do that? I don’t necessarily think so. I remember thinking up there that everything is sort of handled in-house and that’s the way that the community does the victim side of things. There’s certainly no – you don’t drive down the main street and see a victims organisation here and another victims organisation there. Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 5 years with Victoria Police
In terms of victim support services ... where you [have] to get people housing, those sorts of services, there are more of them in the city and it’s easier. And in the country you find yourself using other options like friends or family as opposed to actually recognised support services.

Outer urban station, Snr Const. [Prosecution], 12 years with Victoria Police

However, local knowledge, experience and expertise was also identified as important:

I worked here in [regional centre] for nine years before I went to [rural station with one office] so I know what services are available here and ... I carry most of the brochures and booklets ... at the police station and if they’re [the victims] local people I generally drop them round a booklet and just let them know if they want to talk to people this service is available to you, it’s free, all you’ve gotta do is ring up .... [A] lot of people might not feel comfortable talking to me about it because I’m in the town and they feel embarrassed to walk down the street the next day and walk past me and they’ve told me, sat there crying in front of you or something, and then they’re all embarrassed. So it’s probably better to segregate the two roles too, I mean you don’t want to be a counsellor and a policeman. Remote, Snr Const. [Uniform], 12 years with Victoria Police

Critically, such localised knowledge and expertise are not limited to country Victoria. Indeed, our findings are not divisible by a simplistic regional/city divide whereby innovation, and efforts to create better police–community support agency partnerships, is limited to regional or rural locations. Nor does it appear to be the case that smaller communities necessarily have better communication with local support agencies and/or a more tight-knit community that assists in the provision of support. We often encountered different levels of awareness of, and interaction with, support agencies within the same station, and the key issues pertaining to external services and engagement with such services varied in ways that cannot be explained by the regional/city divide alone. For example, in one station that was extremely proactive in engaging with community support services, participants who worked in different roles had varied stories to tell about their own role, and their awareness and provision of support information to victims:

[This] is one of those places that does have so many services available but yet no one quite knows what services are available for what. Like even the other day I came across another service that I didn’t even know [about] ... I was a little bit embarrassed that in the seven years that I’ve been doing this I didn’t know that that service actually existed and ... you’ll probably find that other members will go, ‘well, we haven’t got any services, there’s nothing to assist us with anything’, and it comes back to not having the knowledge of what does what and I think that ... someone to liaise between police and all those services would take a bit of pressure off the senior sergeants for a start. Major regional station, Snr Const. [SOCAU], 10 years with Victoria Police

See ... with my side of things I use [agency] just around the corner, I usually push them that way. Because ... parts of it is free and otherwise [they can] ... advise [people where] to go and see this person, or ring this number or whatever, and they could lead them through it. So I use [that agency] a fair bit with the trauma side. Major regional station, Snr Const. [Traffic], 10 years with Victoria Police

In my bag I carry Victim Impact Statements that I’ll give to people and I might say, ‘I can’t help you fill it in. If you go around to [the local] Community Centre, they will help you fill it in’. Major regional station, Snr Const. [Uniform], 6 years with Victoria Police
The identification of key individuals who drive innovative victim support practices, as noted earlier, was evident in both city and regional locations, and the level of community connectedness varied across stations. One sergeant was interviewed following his attendance at a meeting with a body representing the local housing estate, security agencies, ambulance, police, local health service and local council, which functioned as a proactive forum for identifying on an ongoing basis the issues that arise, and the relevant services available (Urban station, Sgt [Uniform], 20 years with Victoria Police). Overall, our findings revealed that across different locations there is an opportunity for specific types of innovation that cater for and reflect a community’s unique needs and the types of victims and issues encountered by police in that area.

7.4 Summary

The findings indicate that awareness of and relationships with support services for victims of crime vary across the state. This variation generally reflects differences in the type and volume of crime encountered at stations. However, to some extent engagement with the community and victim support sector is reflective of the leadership focus within the stations and/or within the community sector, where communication and information exchange is fostered and promoted.

1. Main source of support is via referral:

   Police generally rely on the provision of Victims of Crime Information (with a 24-hour contact number), except in relation to sexual assault and domestic violence where specific provisions and processes are in place. It is generally accepted that victims who require support and assistance will access support and assistance via this service.

2. Individual assistance with support access:

   Some police will and do assist some individuals to make direct contact with specific agencies. They do this for a range of reasons, including sympathy or concern, or awareness of specific agencies that may be able to assist (this connects with the findings presented in Section 6.0 – that some police see this as part of their job, while others view this as an ‘extra’ service they are willing to provide only to specific victims of crime).

3. Up-to-date and readily accessible information:

   a. Police find it difficult to identify and to keep up to date with local services that provide support to victims of crime, and often can only name the domestic violence and sexual assault services in their area. This is the case generally across both regional and urban settings.

   b. Awareness of services within any one station varies substantially, and this awareness is linked to the police role but also to individuals’ interest in, and commitment to, playing a direct role in referring victims to specific services.

   c. Police who do seek to access services on behalf of victims of crime experience frustration with the length of time required to do so, and the lack of easily accessible, up-to-date information on appropriate services, which can reinforce the reliance on victims to follow up support independently via the Victims of Crime Helpline.

4. Location-specific service provision and issues:

   d. Police in more geographically isolated areas face greater demands in relation to social services than do police in urban areas.
e. Service provision in regional areas differs substantially from that of urban stations, although in some cases the relatively close-knit interaction between local services may increase police awareness of other agencies.

7.5 Recommendations

1. **Referral is to remain the primary role**
   Victoria Police is mandated to deliver a service that includes the provision of information to victims on where to seek help, and this should remain the primary way in which police provide assistance, as this was reported by police participants to be appropriate and adequate for the majority of victims. However, the findings also indicate the importance of recognising that in some circumstances (determined by location, crime type or the specific needs of the victim) there is a need for additional service provision above and beyond supplying a contact number. Victoria Police has an opportunity to enable and enhance this process without shifting the emphasis away from referral as the primary focus of police support for victims in the majority of circumstances.

2. **Compile and update locally specific directories of service**
   The findings demonstrated the need for greater recognition of how local services can assist police in specific stations and regions to access clear, up-to-date information regarding local support services, in addition to the general Victims of Crime Helpline. This needs to be tailored to specific locations and local areas. Establishing systems and processes for maintaining regular updates of the local contacts would ensure that this process occurs consistently across the state. The directories should include information such as the name of the service, its hours of operation, a contact number and name, and a brief synopsis of the support provided and inclusions and exclusions regarding who the service supports. While determining the best way to do this is the decision of Victoria Police, we recommend that this information be made available in both hard-copy format and electronically via the Victoria Police intranet. According to our findings, the most effective communication of this information is not via email but rather through regular updates at read-outs.

3. **Victoria Police–service provider forums**
   This report has noted that effective and mutually beneficial relationships between Victoria Police and an array of victims of crime service providers are frequently forged as a result of personal relationships between, and the proactive attitude of, individual officers and specific service provider staff. These practices should be enabled and encouraged wherever possible. We recommend, therefore, that Victoria Police trial Victoria Police–service provider forums in two locations, with a view to their potential roll-out across the state, pending evaluation. Representatives from service providers should be invited to present information about their service to front-line officers, and front-line officers and service providers should be given the opportunity to network and form effective professional relationships. These need not be overly frequent – one forum each six months should be sufficient. They might potentially be timed to coincide with read-outs, when the greatest number of personnel are present. This has proved extremely effective in some police forces in the US and Canada. A similar concept was also reported as useful and effective when adopted at a station in Victoria.
4. Victoria Police–Department of Human Services joint working party

It emerged from our data that the interface between operational police and DHS is widely perceived as problematic and dysfunctional by front-line police officers. It is imperative, therefore, that an inter-agency approach be adopted to scope these issues and collaboratively canvass potential solutions. We recommend that a relevant area of Victoria Police (the Community and Diversity Division, for example) approach DHS with a view to forming a joint working party to examine whether and how the interface between the two agencies might be improved. If the proposal receives assent from both agencies, terms of reference should be drafted collaboratively, taking into account the issues that have been raised in this research.
8.0 Conclusion

This report presents the findings gathered from interviews with over 200 operational Victoria Police members. For the first time this research details police attitudes and practices in relation to seeking to provide support to victims of crime while also meeting the other demands and obligations required by their role as serving Victoria Police officers. The findings and recommendations presented in this report are focused upon recognising much of the work and practice that occurs across Victoria on a daily basis that goes largely unrecognised by Victoria Police and the Victorian community more generally, as much of the good work done by police is rarely seen or acknowledged. The release of these findings is particularly timely, only a few years after the implementation of the Victims’ Charter, at a point at which Victoria Police and the Victorian community can reflect upon the extent to which service delivery standards have translated into best practice. There is significant innovation and work being undertaken in community-specific ways across Victoria in relation to victim support. There are also a range of areas in which practices and processes that have recently been implemented require rethinking in light of the lived experience of police officers working on the ground to implement these practices and protocols. The recommendations proposed in this report reflect the findings of our research and are intended to contribute towards enhancing and enriching police–victim interaction and victim experiences of the criminal justice system more generally.
References


## Appendix 1: Full data summary table

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Appendix 1
Appendix 2: Interview Documents

Explanatory Statement

Date:

Project Title: Providing support to actual & potential victims by Victoria Police, Australia

My name is [insert name of researcher] and I am involved in a project conducting research into Australian and international best practice models of police-provided victim support. This research is a part of a larger collaborative research project involving Victoria Police, Monash University (Australia), The University of Melbourne (Australia) and Northwestern University (Evanston, USA).

It is well established that the experience of victims is critical to building public confidence in the criminal justice system and to the effective operation of criminal justice agencies. Successful models of victim support are therefore vital to fostering public confidence in the criminal justice system and enhancing its overall efficiency. The aim of this project is to examine the implementation of models and strategies of victim support used by Victoria Police and to examine these processes in order work towards developing a best practice model.

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time. Participation will take approximately forty minutes to an hour and will involve talking about your role in relation to working with victims of crime and/or marginalised groups in Victoria. Participating in this research should not generate any benefit or negative consequence for you personally.

The research will focus on your role and your experiences in working with victims of crime and/or marginalised or at-risk community groups. Other discussion points will include some victim support issues that have arisen in the past and more recently in your area and to identify what currently works well in victim support and what areas require further development. The information gathered will be compiled into a report on best practice models that will be provided to Victoria Police. It will also be developed for reporting to a wide range of policy and academic forums and used for conference presentations and journal articles.

As this research is contributing to the development of a tool for practitioners and academics alike, the information gathered in this interview will identify your position as a Victorian Police officer and your rank/position. However, if you wish for personal information to be de-identified in the reporting of the data that will be arranged (through the use of a pseudonym and not reporting the location of the station at which you are based). It is not anticipated that any of the information gathered will be of a sensitive or private nature. However if you feel concerned or distressed about issues raised in the interview you can contact the Victoria Police Employee Support Services on 9301 6900. The Police Association and the Community and Public Sector Union also offer support services for members.

As Monash University researchers are undertaking this research, the details of the Monash Ethics Committee are below. However, for this research approval has also been granted from Victoria Police Human Research Ethics Committee [VPHREC]. The Secretary of the VPHREC can be contacted on (03) 9247 3690.

The interview will be digitally recorded and the records will be kept on a password-protected computer file. Only the researchers will have access to this information. The recordings will be kept for five years and then destroyed.

If you have any queries or would like to be informed of the research findings, please contact me [Ph 03 990 5 2986, email: Marie.Segrave@arts.monash.edu.au].

Thank you.

Should you have any complaint concerning the manner in which this research [Project CF07/4750] is conducted, please do not hesitate to contact the Monash University Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans at the following address:

The Secretary,
The Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH)
Building 3D, Research Grants & Ethics Branch
Monash University VIC 3800
Tel: +61 3 9905 2052    Fax: +61 3 9905 1420    Email: scerh@adm.monash.edu.au
**Informed Consent Form**

Date:

**Project Title:** Providing support to actual & potential victims by Victoria Police, Australia

I agree to take part in the above Monash University research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I can keep for my records.

I agree to:

- be interviewed by the researcher ................................................................. YES □ NO □
- allow the interview to be digitally recorded ..................................................... YES □ NO □
- allow the information I provide to be used in further publications
  such as journals and conferences ............................................................... YES □ NO □

**Anonymity**

I understand that the information I give will be linked to the organisation I work for.

I request that all personal information (such as my name) is de-identified in the reporting of the data.

☐ YES (Please DO NOT use my real name)

OR

☐ NO (I am happy for my real name to be used)

**Recording**

I understand that the recording of this interview will be kept on file at Monash University. This file will be password-protected and only the researchers will have access to the information. All recordings will be destroyed in five years time.

**Participation**

I also understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in the project. I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

Name: ________________________________

Signature: ________________________________

Date: ______/_____/_____
Interview schedule interviews will be semi-structured, so the questions below are simply a guide to assist the researcher in prompting the general discussion of the interview. The same basic outline will be also used if an opportunity to conduct a focus group arises.

Victims & your work
- who/what are the victims [or potential victims/marginalised groups] that you come into contact with? Are they from mixed backgrounds, wide ranging offences, or mostly from particular groups etc?
- are there differences between different types of victims- based on the type of crime or the victim’s community group/personality etc
- are there differences between victims in terms of their need, of trauma, of the amount of work they may create for police?
- what do victims you work with generally want from police? Support? Information?
- Are these reasonable/realistic expectations?
- Is there a difference between what victims may want and what police can or should do for victims?

Models of Victim & Witness Support in your organisation
- what processes/procedures are in place for assisting victims, does this work well?
  What agencies do you interact with- how well does the interaction work? Do you have concerns about any of these processes or the services that are/are not provided?
- Does support differ for different victims- according to the crime type? According to the victim’s status (gender, race, age, class etc)?

Outcomes
- If it were up to you, how would you design and run the process of providing support to victims?
- Given the many demands on police in your position what would make your job easier esp. re interaction w victims & support agencies?

Marginalised groups
- Discussions around victims sometimes focuses on specific crimes, e.g. lots of attention re sexual assault but also around marginalised or at-risk groups, such as homeless, youth & indigenous groups
  - do these groups take up a lot of your time, as victims or as offenders or both
  - are there other groups in this area who are also at more risk, groups of victims who might be difficult to reach?