

FACULTY ANNOUNCEMENT

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Support for victims of crime

"The project aims to bring together leading academics and social service providers to assess the support given to victims of crime in the Asian region. In doing so, policy makers and field workers in Singapore can be made more aware of the themes and developments in other parts of the world relating to victim services..."

Associate Professor Chan Wing Cheong, Faculty of Law



REDRESSING IMBALANCE: Associate Professor Chan Wing Cheong researches into the needs of victims of crime. Justice may be meted out with the offender fined, jailed, or both. But victims of crime are often left confused and traumatised by the experience in addition to having suffered physical and emotional harm or loss of property. The criminal justice system in many countries however, does not offer any redress or support for such victims.

The law has been focused on apprehending and securing convictions against those who were thought to pose threats to society. Victims of crime are still being virtually ignored by the criminal justice process in many countries. The study of

victims of crime is a relatively new field and it was only in the last 30 years or so that attention has been focused on the relevance of victims in the criminal justice process and their needs.

The growth of the "victim movement" in many parts of the world in the 1970s in countries such as the US, Canada and UK; as well as in Japan, Taiwan and Korea in more recent years, has sought to correct this imbalance, said Associate Professor Chan Wing Cheong, Faculty of Law who has been researching this area of criminal law since 2005.

"Even in Singapore, we have witnessed the use of Victim Impact Statements in sexual cases to allow victims to convey to the judge, the seriousness of the offence on their physical and mental health as well as the involvement of victims in Family Conferences in juvenile cases," said Associate Professor Chan.

Though there have been developments in Singapore in the last 10 years or so to address the needs of victims of crime, large numbers of victims such as the elderly and victims of property offences may not be adequately assisted in having their needs met and guided through the legal process. Victims of child abuse, domestic violence and sexual abuse are better off in terms of support services made available to them. "But we found that other victims do not get the same support and these are the gaps we are looking at," said Associate Professor Chan. A victim of elder abuse in the home may get support from the law -- but the same victim is treated differently if he or she is a victim of a robbery, for example.

"The state of victim services in Singapore is not well developed or well coordinated. There is much to



be learnt from other jurisdictions, particularly those around the region, on how victim needs are met, their recovery enhanced, and justice secured," said Associate Professor Chan.

In Hong Kong for example, a Victim's Charter set out in 2000 requires victims to be informed of the action they can take, the progress of the investigation and prosecution of the case, and the final disposal of the case.

IMBALANCE: The law has been focused on apprehending and securing convictions against those who were thought to pose threats to society. Support for victims post crime is ignored by the criminal justice process in many countries. The legal systems of Singapore, Malaysia and India have common roots as all three were former British colonies. "Interestingly, there is a similar provision found in their respective Criminal Procedure Codes -- which was enacted from early times well before corresponding provisions in other jurisdictions," said Associate Professor Chan. This provision gives a judge in a criminal trial, the discretion to order an offender to pay monetary compensation to the victims of the offence, he explained.

Associate Professor Chan's research also studies the way the courts in Singapore, Malaysia and India have interpreted this provision in their respective Criminal Procedure Codes and how it has been used. Comparisons are made between these jurisdictions as well as with other jurisdictions on the scope of the compensation order.

"It is argued that it is time for courts in Singapore, Malaysia and India to fully utilise the compensation order, as well as for the legislatures of these countries to craft new schemes in order to ensue that victims of crime do not suffer unnecessarily," said Associate Professor Chan.

His research has brought together international experts which has cumulated in a first-ever symposium on support for victims of crime in Singapore. The two-day symposium (25-26 May 2006) organised by the Faculty of Law and Department of Social Work, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, was held in partnership with the Subordinate Courts of Singapore and the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports.

"The project aims to bring together leading academics and social service providers to assess the support given to victims of crime in the Asian region. In doing so, policy makers and field workers in Singapore can be made more aware of the themes and developments in other parts of the world relating to victim services, as well as opportunity given to showcase the successful efforts in Singapore in this respect," said Associate Professor Chan.