Support for victims of crime

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Associate Professor Chan Wing Cheong, Faculty of Law

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 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.

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