

WHEN I BECOME A VICTIM OF A CRIME

- What are the likely psychological and physical consequences?**
- How can I deal with these consequences alone?**
- How can my friends and relatives help?**
- What can I expect from the police?**
- Where else can I go for help?**

A crime represents, for victims, a very stressful event that can shatter their personal equilibrium and their feeling of security and trust. Victims frequently face different psychological and social consequences of the crime that can remain with them long after the physical wounds have healed. Frequently, the consequences of such trauma are feelings of fear, anger, sadness, helplessness, isolation, feelings of guilt... Long-term physical and psychological disorders may also appear.

A crime can change individuals' perception of themselves and their environment, in which they felt safe before and in harmony with themselves and others. Such feelings may also be experienced by a victim's relatives and friends.

A CRIME, SUCH AS BODILY HARM, RAPE, ROBBERY, ATTEMPTED MURDER OR BURGLARY, BLACKMAIL, THEFT OR OTHER, ALWAYS REPRESENT FOR A VICTIM AN INTRUSION INTO THEIR PERSONAL INTEGRITY AND PRIVACY.

What are the possible physical and psychological consequences for victims of a crime?

The consequences of highly stressful events, such as some criminal offences, can be very different. They depend on the nature and duration of the crime, on the victim and on other circumstances.

Possible consequences of criminal offences:

- SHOCK
- FEAR
- INTENSE AGITATION
- REEXPERIENCING THE TRAUMA (intrusive thoughts, nightmares, flashback episodes)
- FEELING OF "LOSING MY MIND", "BEING IN A HAZE", UNREALITY
- IMPATIENCE, IRRITATION, ANGRY OUTBURSTS
- DENIAL ("it isn't true", "it can't be possible")
- AVOIDING (places, thoughts, people, activities reminding of the event)
- SHUTTING OFF
- FEELINGS OF LONELINESS (a feeling that you lost any contact with others)
- EMOTIONAL NUMBNESS
- FEELINGS OF HELPLESSNESS, DESPAIR, INSECURITY, DREAD
- ANGER
- FEELINGS OF GUILT, SHAME
- SADNESS, DEPRESSION
- NEGATIVE SELF-IMAGE
- NEGATIVE PICTURE OF THE WORLD, THE ENVIRONMENT
- PROBLEMS IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS
- SEXUAL PROBLEMS
- PARTNERSHIP PROBLEMS

- CONCENTRATION PROBLEMS, NARROW ATTENTIONAL FOCUS
- EATING DISORDERS
- SLEEPING DISORDERS
- LOW WORK PRODUCTIVITY AND EFFICIENCY
- LOSS OF INTERESTS
- CONFUSION, DISORIENTATION
- PROBLEMS IN MAKING DECISIONS
- FORGETFULNESS
- FEELING OF HAVING NO CONTROL
- ABUSE OF ALCOHOL AND OTHER SUBSTANCES
- INCREASED HEART RATE
- HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE
- BREATHING DIFFICULTIES
- CHEST PAIN
- MUSCULAR TENSION AND PAIN
- FATIGUE
- FAINTING
- FEVER
- INCREASED PERSPIRATION
- THIRST
- VERTIGO
- HEADACHE

Remember: WHAT YOU'RE EXPERIENCING IS NORMAL REACTIONS TO AN ABNORMAL SITUATION. YOU HAVEN'T LOST YOUR MIND!

Possible consequences of criminal offences in children:

- BEHAVIOURAL REGRESSION (bedwetting, thumb sucking, clinging to parents, crying)
- INCREASED FEAR, ANXIETY (fear of darkness, fear of being alone)
- SADNESS
- CLINGING TO PARENTS, PROBLEMS WHEN PARTING FROM PARENTS
- IRRITABILITY, IMPATIENCE
- AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR (towards other people, toys, animals)
- DEFIANT BEHAVIOUR
- SOCIAL ISOLATION (retreat into their own world)
- SLEEP DISORDERS (nightmares)
- LOSS OF OR INCREASE IN APPETITE
- PHYSICAL PROBLEMS, PAINS (headache, stomach ache)
- CONFUSION
- POOR LEARNING EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS
- CONCENTRATION PROBLEMS
- LOSS OF INTERESTS
- BEHAVIOUR AIMED AT ATTRACTING ATTENTION

As a consequence of a crime a victim may suffer **POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER**.

We can talk about **POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER** if a victim still suffers a combination of the above consequences a month or several months after the crime.

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER CAN SERIOUSLY AFFECT YOUR LIFE THEREFORE SEEKING PROFESSIONAL HELP IS RECOMMENDED.

Similar changes and problems may also be experienced by traffic accident victims and other severely stressful events.

How can you deal with the consequences of a criminal offence alone?

- Talk to people you trust about how you are feeling, what you are going through, what you are thinking about.
- Fear, anger, sadness and similar feelings are normal. Express them.
- Allow yourself to feel pain.
- Seek professional help from a doctor, or a psychologist.
- If your doctor prescribed medication, take it regularly and in prescribed quantity.
- Make sure you keep in good physical and psychological condition. Get enough sleep, rest and eat regularly.
- As soon as possible go back to your usual daily routine but do not overdo your daily obligations if you are feeling tired and unwell.
- Exercise, be active, but do not overdo it.
- Start taking smaller, less important decisions. This will give you back the feeling of control over your life.
- Keep a diary.
- Do your tasks gradually and carefully. After severe stress you are more likely to have an accident.
- Remember the things that helped you deal with stressful events in the past (e.g. a death in the family, divorce).
- Do things that make you feel good.
- Remember the things that fill you with hope, that you used to look forward to, or still do. Think of them when you are feeling down.
- Unpleasant, intrusive thoughts of the event, nightmares, flashback episodes are normal consequences of a criminal offence. Accept them as part of the healing process. With time they will fade away and stop. Do not deny them. Talk about them.

What is best avoided?

- Do not shut off from the world and do not exclude your friends and relatives from your life.
- Avoid alcohol and similar substances to alleviate emotional pain. Addiction to substances will not help your recovery. It will become an additional problem.
- Do not blame yourself for what happened to you.
- Do not suppress your feelings. Allow yourself to express them.

Emotional pain is not endless. With time it will subside and go away.

Some advice for relatives and friends

- Talk to the victims.
- Encourage them to talk about what happened to them and how they feel, what they are going through, what they are thinking about.
- Listen carefully.
- Tell them you are sorry for what happened to them, that you understand their distress and want to help them.
- Let them express their feelings and try to accept them.
- Do not take their feelings and behaviour personally (e.g. anger, quick temper).
- Tell them that what happened to them was not their fault.
- Tell and show them they are not alone.
- Take time and spend it with the victim.
- Let them be alone when they want to.
- Offer them help and support even if they did not ask for it.
- Help them with everyday chores.
- Do not belittle their distress. Do not tell them that they were lucky because it could be worse and that it is not so bad.
- Be patient and tolerant.
- Get information about the possible consequences of a trauma such as being a victim of crime. You will understand better what is going on with the victim.

EVERY VICTIM NEEDS TO FEEL SECURE. YOU CAN BE OF GREAT HELP IN THAT.

What can you expect from the police?

THE BASIC DUTY OF THE POLICE IS TO PROTECT LIVES, PERSONAL SAFETY AND PEOPLE'S PROPERTY

The police

prevent, detect and investigate criminal offences and misdemeanours, detect and arrest offenders and hand them over to appropriate bodies.

"If grounds exist for suspicion that a criminal offence liable to public prosecution has been committed, internal affairs agencies shall be bound to take steps necessary for discovering the perpetrator, ensuring that the perpetrator or his accomplice do not go into hiding or flee, detecting and preserving traces of crime or objects of value as evidence, and collecting all information that may be useful for the successful conducting of criminal proceedings." (Criminal Procedure Act, Article 148)

If a criminal offence has been committed to your detriment, report it orally or in writing at a police station or a police directorate. Based on your report police officers and/or criminal investigators will start investigating the offence.

The police will need all the information about the criminal offence that you can provide (when and where it was committed, how, who the perpetrator was, or a detailed description of the offender if you do not know their identity, data on the stolen property, damage, etc.).

The police will also collect information from any witnesses or any other people who could provide information useful for the investigation.

The police will detect and collect material evidence so it is important to report the crime as soon as possible. Pay attention to any possible traces of the criminal offence and, if possible, keep them as they may be important material evidence in further procedure. In certain cases you will be requested to hand over the clothes you were wearing at the time of the crime or to undergo a physical examination at a medical institution.

Police officers will file a crime report against the suspect at the appropriate state prosecutor's office and the state prosecutor will be responsible for the procedure at the appropriate court.

If you wish the police will explain the investigation procedure to you as well as the procedure with the judicial bodies. They will acquaint you with different forms of assistance, such as psychological, legal, material.

You can get information about the investigation of the crime affecting you from the police officer on the case.

As a victim of a criminal offence you have a right to:

- information on the police investigation and its outcome;
- a copy of the crime report that you gave to the police;
- legal assistance by an attorney;
- assistance and support of a trusted person who may accompany you in procedures at the police, court, social work centre and anywhere else you want;
- assistance and support by competent government institutions (health authorities, social work centres, counselling centres) and non-governmental organisations which help victims of violence and crime;
- be acquainted with your role in the police investigation;
- file a pecuniary claim when reporting the crime to the police;
- appeal.

Where else can you get help, support, information?

As a victim of a criminal offence you can get psychosocial assistance and counselling, which is provided by various institutions (medical institutions, social work centres, counselling centres, non-governmental organisations specialising in helping victims of violence). Some organisations can provide help and support during various procedures that follow the reporting of a criminal offence.

You can get more information about these institutions from the police officer responsible for your case.

COUNSELLING AND PRACTICAL ASSISTANCE HELP VICTIMS OF A CRIME TO ANALYSE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE CRIMINAL OFFENCE AND ESTABLISH AGAIN THE FEELING OF BALANCE AND SECURITY.