

Victims of Crime as EAP Clients

By Lisa Teems and Dale Masi
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Employee Counseling Services

In 1982, President Reagan created a national Task Force on Victims of Crime to address the needs of the millions of Americans and their families who are victimized each year and who often carry the scars into the years to come. He recognized that in the past these victims have needed help and their needs have gone unattended. Their wounds—personal, emotional, and

financial—had been given no attention. Through the establishment of the task force, the President committed himself to ending that neglect.

One of the areas of concern for the staff of the task force was ways in which victims could be helped at their work place. The executive director of the task force contacted Dr. Dale Masi, Director of Employee Counseling Services at the Department of Health and Human Services, for recommendations in this area. A document was prepared in response to this request, and in December, 1982, the task force completed its work and published a volume entitled, "President's Task Force on Victims of Crime, Final Report, December, 1982." It outlined task force recommendations to the President for addressing this problem.

A number of recommendations were made encouraging the expansion of employee assistance programs (EAP) to assist victims of crime. We feel these are important recommendations and bring credibility to the EAP field. Here are the reprinted sections of the report that address EAPs.

- Legislation should be proposed and enacted to establish or expand employee assistance programs for victims of crime employed by the government.

Victims of crime and the problems that they face are so numerous that it requires the coordinated effort of many organizations and individuals, in both government and the private sector, to help them recover from the crime and contribute to a successful prosecution. Even an excellently staffed and operated victim/witness assistance unit depends on the cooperation and good will of other sources. Employee assistance programs are an excellent resource.

Agencies in the federal government are mandated to establish and operate employee assistance programs. These programs were established to assist employees whose job performance had been jeopardized by mental health problems or drug or alcohol abuse. The psychological trauma that violent crime produces can frequently affect work performance. A comprehensive program to assist victims of crime benefits both the employee and the government [employer]. Government [employer] will ultimately benefit by improved job performance.

Examination of jurisdictions that have victim/witness assistance units has shown that many victims are unaware of the existence of such units. An individual is more likely to be aware of a service provided through his employment than he is of a unit associated with the criminal justice system.

Employee assistance programs can perform many services. Trained counselors can both advise the employee and explain his situation to his supervisor. They can maintain a list of mental health practitioners qualified to assist victims. They can help the victim with any difficulties that arise with creditors, and can refer them to needed social service and victim compensation programs. The existence of such a program conveys to the employee that his employer is concerned about his welfare and supports his willingness to assist the criminal justice system.

A number of states have also set up programs

for their employees. The beneficial aspects of these governmental programs are twofold: first, their employees receive direct assistance at the work place, and second, they serve as a role model for organizations in the private sector. Federal, state, and local governments should fully support and expand employee assistance programs, with additional emphasis on assisting victims of crime.

- Businesses should establish employee assistance programs for victims of crime.

Every employer has to deal with personnel difficulties from time to time. In a small business, attention is usually given on a personal basis. Larger organizations, however, often have employee assistance programs to help their workers face problems such as illness, alcohol or drug abuse, and family difficulties. Many businesses have crime prevention programs for their employees, and some have programs specifically designed to assist employees who have been victims of crime. Both large and small businesses can profit by helping employees who have been victimized. □