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The Protection of Crime Victims in Contemporary Justice Systems: Legal Frameworks, Institutional Innovations, and Societal Challenges

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The protection of crime victims has evolved into a central pillar of modern justice systems, reflecting a growing consensus on the need to uphold victims' rights, dignity, and well-being. This paper critically examines the legal, institutional, and societal dimensions of victim protection, with an emphasis on the persistent gap between formal rights and their practical implementation. Drawing on comparative insights from various jurisdictions, the study explores the effectiveness of multidisciplinary and trauma-informed approaches, as well as the potential of problem-solving and restorative justice models in fostering victim-centred justice. The findings reveal that effective protection requires not only robust legal frameworks but also integrated institutional support, societal change, and sustained professional training. Based on this analysis, the paper offers evidence-based policy recommendations aimed at strengthening victim protection in contemporary legal systems.

Keywords: *victim protection, secondary victimisation, trauma-informed justice, multidisciplinary approach, problem-solving courts.*

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Introduction

The protection of crime victims has emerged as a pivotal issue in contemporary legal, criminological, and human rights discourse. Modern justice systems increasingly recognise that victims are not merely passive participants but key stakeholders whose rights, dignity, and well-being must be actively safeguarded (Doak, 2005). Despite the advancements in international human rights standards, such as the United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power (UN, 1985) and the European Union Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support, and protection of victims of crime, the practical implementation of these norms remains uneven (European Union, 2012).

One of the persistent challenges is achieving a balance between the protection of victims and the safeguarding of fair trial rights for the accused. This tension is compounded by the phenomenon of secondary victimisation, where victims are subjected to additional harm through their interactions with the criminal justice system itself, including insensitive questioning, lengthy proceedings, and scepticism about their credibility (Herman, 2003; McGlynn & Westmarland, 2019; Varona, 2024). Secondary victimisation undermines the very principles that victim-centred reforms aim to uphold, further discouraging victims from participating in the legal process (Prović, 2024).

Moreover, existing research underscores that legal protections alone are insufficient without robust institutional mechanisms and societal support (Butorac & Kikić, 2024; Haverkamp & Hohendorf, 2023). Effective victim protection requires a multidisciplinary approach, integrating legal, psychological, and social services to address the complex and intersecting needs of victims. Trauma-informed practices, which emphasise sensitivity to victims' psychological experiences, have been shown to reduce secondary victimisation and promote greater victim engagement in legal proceedings (Despotović & Tanasijević, 2023).

In addition, emerging restorative justice practices offer alternative mechanisms for addressing victims' needs by fostering dialogue, acknowledgement of harm, and community-based healing processes. Although restorative justice models are not without limitations, recent studies emphasise their potential to complement formal judicial mechanisms by fostering victim empowerment, encouraging offender accountability, and mitigating re-traumatisation (Campbell et al., 2024; McGlynn & Westmarland, 2019; Rugge, 2009).

Comparative analyses reveal significant disparities between countries in the implementation of victim-centred practices. While some jurisdictions, such as Sweden and the Netherlands, have developed integrated support systems characterised by inter-agency cooperation and comprehensive victim services, others continue to struggle with fragmented and underfunded protection mechanisms (Dokmanović, 2022; Luković Radaković, 2024).

This paper aims to identify and analyse key legal and institutional factors influencing the efficiency of victim protection, with particular attention to the adoption of multidisciplinary and trauma-informed models. Two questions are addressed: a) What are the key legal and institutional factors that contribute to effective victim protection in judicial systems? and b) How do multidisciplinary models and trauma-informed practices impact the reduction of secondary victimisation in different jurisdictions? By providing a comparative analysis based on recent empirical studies and policy frameworks, this paper seeks to enrich the existing literature and offer practical recommendations for improving victim protection in contemporary judicial systems.

Legal and institutional framework for victim protection

The legal and institutional protection of crime victims has evolved significantly since the late 20th century, driven by the growing recognition of victims' rights as integral to the pursuit of justice. Landmark international instruments, most notably the United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power (1985)¹ and the Council of Europe Recommendation R(85)11², provided the impetus for embedding victim rights into the architecture of national legal systems. The legally binding Directive 2012/29/EU³ further reinforced this trajectory, mandating comprehensive standards for the treatment, protection, and participation of victims within European Union member states.

¹ United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power, adopted on November 29, 1985, by General Assembly Resolution 40/34.

² Council of Europe Recommendation No. R (85) 11 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Position of the Victim in the Framework of Criminal Law and Procedure, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 28 June 1985 at the 387th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies

³ European Union Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 Establishing Minimum Standards on the Rights, Support and Protection of Victims of Crime

Although these instruments have considerably advanced the normative framework surrounding victims' rights, the translation into effective domestic protections has been uneven. Numerous studies reveal a persistent implementation gap between the formal enshrinement of rights and their practical realisation within judicial systems (Doak, 2005). While legislative reforms have proliferated, challenges remain in operationalising these rights in a manner that meaningfully supports victims throughout their engagement with the criminal justice system.

Examining the experiences of different jurisdictions elucidates both the successes and limitations inherent in this process. Sweden serves as an exemplar of best practices, where victim support services are fully integrated into the justice process. Institutions such as *Brottsofferjouren* (Victim Support Sweden) provide a coordinated array of legal, psychological, and social services, complemented by the provision of state-funded legal counsel for victims of serious crimes (*Brottsofferjouren*, 2025; *Victim Support Europe*, 2019). The model is further strengthened by systematic training of legal professionals in victim-sensitive practices and institutional frameworks for implementation, ensuring that procedural rights translate into substantive protections (OSCE/ODIHR, 2024).

A similarly robust framework is found in the Netherlands, where *Victim Support Netherlands* (*Slachtofferhulp Nederland*) functions as an essential pillar of the justice system. Here, early intervention ensures that victims are promptly informed of their rights and entitlements, facilitating access to necessary support services from the outset of criminal proceedings. *Victim Support Netherlands* has established a combined support model, offering both legal advice and emotional assistance to individuals navigating the judicial process (*Victim Support Europe*, 2024). Innovations such as the formal incorporation of *Victim Impact Statements* into trial proceedings reflect efforts to enhance victims' participatory rights and offer them a structured opportunity to articulate the harm suffered, thereby reinforcing procedural justice and victim agency (Bosma et al., 2021).

However, a comparison with jurisdictions such as Serbia reveals the enduring challenges of bridging the gap between normative aspirations and institutional realities. Although legislative reforms, notably the adoption of amendments aligning with the *EU Victims' Rights Directive*, have laid the groundwork for improved victim protection, deficiencies persist in practice (Ćopić & Šaćiri, 2020). Limited institutional capacity, insufficient training of

judicial actors, and the uneven geographic distribution of support services undermine the effectiveness of these reforms, leaving many victims without meaningful access to justice (Dokmanović, 2022; Luković Radaković, 2024).

Further insight can be gained from examining developments in Germany, where the enactment of the Victim Protection Improvement Act (*Opferschutzgesetz*, 2016) has expanded procedural rights for victims, particularly in sensitive cases such as human trafficking and gender-based violence (Haverkamp & Hohendorf, 2023). Despite such progress, implementation challenges persist, reflecting broader European trends highlighted by the European Commission's 2020 report on the enforcement of the Victims' Rights Directive, which points to inconsistencies in service provision and shortcomings in individualised needs assessments (European Commission, 2020).

Looking beyond Europe, jurisdictions like Canada and Australia offer instructive examples of advanced victim-centred frameworks. Canada's Victims Bill of Rights (2015) and Australia's Victims' Rights and Support Act (2013) articulate comprehensive rights to information, protection, participation, and restitution. However, critiques underline the difficulties in ensuring consistent application across decentralised systems and the persistent access barriers faced by marginalised populations (Department of Justice Canada, 2017; Lloyd et al., 2023).

These comparative insights underscore a critical lesson: while the codification of victims' rights represents a significant normative achievement, it is not sufficient in itself. Effective victim protection necessitates not only comprehensive legal frameworks but also institutional arrangements capable of delivering these protections in practice. This requires sustained investment in professional training, the development of multidisciplinary support infrastructures, and the adoption of victim-centred procedural adaptations. As demonstrated by the experiences of Sweden, the Netherlands, and Germany, the institutionalisation of trauma-informed and multidisciplinary practices can significantly enhance the efficacy of victim protection measures.

In Serbia, however, persistent challenges remain. Fragmentation of services, resource disparities between urban and rural areas, and cultural barriers within legal institutions continue to impede the realisation of victim rights (Randelović et al., 2023). Furthermore, the absence of trauma-informed judicial practices often results in secondary victimisation, undermining victims' trust in the justice system (Milosavljević-Đukić & Ignjatović, 2024).

Nevertheless, emerging trends offer grounds for cautious optimism. The proliferation of integrated victim support centres, the expansion of participatory mechanisms such as Victim Impact Statements, and the growing emphasis on trauma-informed legal practices reflect an evolving understanding of what victim-centred justice requires.

In sum, the development of an effective legal and institutional framework for victim protection demands a comprehensive approach that goes beyond formal legislative enactments. It must encompass a commitment to institutional reform, professional development, and cultural change - all aimed at ensuring that victims are not merely acknowledged within the justice process but are actively supported and empowered.

Multidisciplinary approaches and trauma-informed practices

As the complexity of crime victimisation becomes increasingly apparent, it has become evident that traditional adversarial legal frameworks, although crucial for safeguarding the rights of the accused, often fall short in addressing the multifaceted needs of victims. Consequently, a growing body of scholarship and policy innovation emphasises the necessity of multidisciplinary and trauma-informed approaches within judicial systems. These approaches seek to transcend the conventional limitations of criminal proceedings by integrating legal, psychological, and social support services, thereby mitigating the risk of secondary victimisation and fostering more meaningful victim participation.

A multidisciplinary approach in victim protection refers to coordinated interventions among legal, health, social, and psychological services aimed at addressing the comprehensive needs of victims. These models emphasise cooperation across agencies and sectors (Victim Support Europe, 2024). A trauma-informed approach, on the other hand, recognises the prevalence and impact of trauma and seeks to create environments that do not re-traumatise victims. Such practices promote safety, trustworthiness, peer support, and empowerment in institutional settings (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2019; Holder, 2018). Trauma-informed judicial practices, grounded in a robust body of psychological research, are predicated on the understanding that victimisation often results in profound and lasting psychological harm (Herman, 2003). Traditional courtroom procedures, characterised

by adversarial cross-examinations, procedural delays, and public scrutiny, can re-traumatise victims, compounding their suffering and deterring future engagement with the legal system. As a response, trauma-informed models advocate for procedural adaptations such as the use of remote testimony technologies, the minimisation of repetitive questioning, and the provision of trained support persons throughout the legal process (Haverkamp & Hohendorf, 2023; McGlynn & Westmarland, 2019).

Empirical evidence from jurisdictions that have adopted trauma-informed methodologies demonstrates their efficacy. In Germany, mandatory training for judges and prosecutors on the psychological impact of victimisation has been correlated with improved courtroom experiences for victims of intimate partner violence and sexual assault (Haverkamp & Hohendorf, 2023). Similarly, Canada's expansion of specialised domestic violence courts incorporates trauma-informed practices by offering victims coordinated support services, judicial oversight of offender compliance with protective orders, and reduced procedural formalities (Department of Justice Canada, 2017).

In Spain, pilot programs based on a trauma-informed framework have introduced innovations such as victim accompaniment services during trials and dedicated courtrooms designed to ensure privacy and psychological comfort (Varona, 2024). Evaluations of these programs suggest that victims report greater satisfaction with the legal process and are more likely to participate fully in proceedings. Beyond procedural reforms, there is increasing recognition of the need for problem-solving courts, a judicial innovation aimed at addressing the underlying social, psychological, and structural issues that contribute to victimisation and offender recidivism. Although both restorative justice and problem-solving courts are designed to enhance the responsiveness of the justice system to victims' needs and to promote rehabilitation, they operate on fundamentally different premises. Restorative justice emphasises voluntary dialogue and mutual understanding between victim and offender, often outside formal judicial proceedings. In contrast, problem-solving courts are embedded within the judicial system and rely on coordinated, multidisciplinary interventions overseen by a judge to address the broader context of offending and victimisation (Holder, 2018; Seacrest, 2023; Tešović, 2024).

The relevance of the problem-solving court model to victim protection lies in its holistic orientation. Rather than treating victims merely as witnesses or sources of evidence, these courts recognise their complex needs for safety,

psychological healing, and empowerment. In Australia, for instance, programs integrate trauma counselling, victim advocacy, and judicial monitoring within specialised family violence courts, significantly improving victim retention rates in legal proceedings (Lloyd et al., 2023). In the United Kingdom, problem-solving approaches have been embedded in Integrated Domestic Abuse Courts (IDACs), where a single judge handles criminal, civil, and family matters arising from domestic abuse incidents. This integrated model significantly reduces the procedural burden on victims and fosters a consistent, informed judicial response to their complex needs (Scottish Government, 2020).

Despite these promising developments, challenges to the widespread adoption of multidisciplinary and trauma-informed practices persist. Resource constraints, institutional inertia, and the entrenched adversarial culture of many legal systems act as significant barriers. Moreover, scholars warn that while victim-centred and therapeutic approaches enhance support services, they must be carefully implemented to avoid encroaching on defendants' procedural safeguards, thus requiring a nuanced balance between restorative innovation and due process (Doak, 2005; McGlynn & Westmarland, 2019).

Nevertheless, the weight of empirical research supports the contention that a trauma-informed, multidisciplinary approach significantly enhances the efficacy of victim protection mechanisms. It offers not only immediate psychological benefits to victims but also broader systemic advantages, including increased victim cooperation, higher rates of conviction, and enhanced public trust in the justice system (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2019). Ultimately, the adoption of such models signifies a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of justice, not merely as retribution or procedural formality but as a holistic process aimed at restoring the dignity and agency of those harmed by crime. The integration of trauma-informed and problem-solving approaches, as demonstrated in the experiences of Germany, Canada, Spain, Australia, and the United Kingdom, offers a compelling blueprint for jurisdictions seeking to enhance their victim protection frameworks in accordance with both empirical evidence and normative principles of justice.

Societal attitudes and the challenge of secondary victimisation

While legal reforms and institutional innovations have undeniably advanced the protection of crime victims, the broader societal context in which these reforms are implemented remains a decisive factor in their ultimate efficacy. Public attitudes toward victims, and, crucially, the entrenched cultural narratives that shape these attitudes, exert a profound influence on both victims' willingness to engage with the legal system and the manner in which they are treated once they do.

Victim-blaming narratives, rooted in deep-seated gender stereotypes, cultural prejudices, and misconceptions about victim behaviour, continue to undermine efforts to create a truly victim-centred justice system. Studies across diverse legal contexts consistently demonstrate that victims, particularly of sexual and domestic violence, are often subjected to implicit or explicit scepticism, with their credibility questioned based on irrelevant or prejudicial factors such as past behaviour, relationship history, or personal characteristics (Jordan, 2004; McGlynn & Westmarland, 2019).

The phenomenon of secondary victimisation, wherein victims experience further harm through their interactions with the criminal justice system, illustrates the pernicious effects of such attitudes. Secondary victimisation manifests in various forms: insensitive questioning by police and prosecutors, delays in proceedings that prolong psychological distress, and judicial procedures that compel victims to repeatedly recount traumatic experiences in hostile environments (Herman, 2003; Prović, 2024). These experiences not only exacerbate the trauma associated with the original victimisation but also discourage victims from participating in legal processes, thus undermining the very goals of justice.

Empirical evidence points to the persistence of secondary victimisation even in jurisdictions with otherwise robust legal protections for victims. In Germany, despite progressive legislation, qualitative research reveals that victims of intimate partner violence often encounter scepticism and minimisation of their experiences from legal actors (Haverkamp & Hohendorf, 2023). In Canada, similar challenges have been documented, particularly among indigenous populations, where systemic discrimination compounds the risk of secondary victimisation (Department of Justice Canada, 2017). The situation is further complicated in countries undergoing transitional justice processes,

such as Serbia, where residual cultural norms and institutional inertia continue to impede the full realisation of victim rights, despite formal legal alignment with international standards (Ćopić & Šaćiri, 2020; Luković Radaković, 2024). Research indicates that in such contexts, victims frequently perceive the legal system as inaccessible, biased, and ultimately hostile, thereby eroding public confidence in the rule of law (Dokmanović, 2022).

Efforts to address secondary victimisation must therefore extend beyond procedural reforms and encompass broader cultural change. Educational initiatives targeting law enforcement personnel, legal professionals, and the general public are essential for dismantling harmful stereotypes and fostering a more supportive environment for victims. In Germany, for example, mandatory training on trauma-informed practices has been instrumental in reducing the incidence of secondary victimisation, particularly in cases of gender-based violence (Haverkamp & Hohendorf, 2023). Public awareness campaigns can also play a transformative role. Australia's "Stop it at the Start" campaign, aimed at challenging the societal norms that condone disrespect toward women, has demonstrated measurable success in shifting public attitudes and reducing tolerance for gender-based violence (Lloyd et al., 2023). Similarly, Spain has implemented comprehensive national strategies to combat gender stereotypes and promote victim empowerment, contributing to increased reporting rates and improved legal outcomes (Varona, 2024).

However, cultural change is inherently slow and complex. Deeply entrenched social norms are resistant to rapid transformation, particularly when reinforced by institutional practices and systemic inequalities. In addition to institutional and procedural reforms, alternative justice models offer important insights into how secondary victimisation can be mitigated. In this context, the importance of restorative justice models has gained increasing attention. Restorative justice, by emphasising dialogue, acknowledgement, and community engagement, offers an alternative paradigm that prioritises the victim's voice and fosters healing. Recent evidence suggests that such models can promote mutual accountability and psychological closure, particularly in cases involving youth offenders (McGlynn & Westmarland, 2019; Seacrest, 2023).

Programs in New Zealand and Canada have demonstrated that when implemented carefully and voluntarily, restorative justice can offer victims a greater sense of closure and empowerment than traditional legal proceedings. In New Zealand, evaluations of family group conferencing within cases

of family violence reveal that victims report higher satisfaction, a sense of procedural fairness, and emotional relief following restorative sessions (Ministry of Justice, 2023). Similarly, Canadian research shows that victims who participate in restorative justice programs often experience increased empowerment, a reduction in anger, and diminished levels of fear, contributing to their psychological recovery and willingness to engage with the justice system (Rugge, 2009). While restorative justice has been subject to critical scrutiny, more recent evaluations, such as those by McGlynn and Westmarland (2019) and Rugge (2009), highlight both the transformative potential and the inherent limitations of its broader implementation, particularly in cases involving vulnerable victims or serious forms of violence. Nevertheless, restorative approaches are not without critics. Concerns persist regarding the potential for power imbalances, particularly in cases of intimate partner violence, and the risk of re-traumatisation if processes are not properly facilitated (McGlynn & Westmarland, 2019). As such, restorative justice should be viewed not as a panacea but as a complementary mechanism within a broader framework of victim-centred reforms.

In sum, the challenge of secondary victimisation underscores the limitations of legal reforms when they are not accompanied by deeper societal and cultural transformations. Effective victim protection requires a holistic approach that addresses not only procedural injustices but also the social structures and cultural narratives that perpetuate victim marginalisation. Only by confronting these underlying dynamics can justice systems move beyond formal compliance and towards genuine inclusivity and responsiveness to the needs and experiences of victims.

Discussion and policy recommendations

The preceding analysis has elucidated the multifaceted dimensions of victim protection within contemporary justice systems, revealing both the achievements and limitations of current legal, institutional, and societal responses. Against this backdrop, the central research questions of this study, regarding the key legal and institutional factors that contribute to effective victim protection, and the role of multidisciplinary and trauma-informed approaches in mitigating secondary victimisation, can now be addressed with greater precision.

The first question, concerning the foundational elements of effective victim protection, underscores the necessity of a robust legal framework aligned with international standards, but also points to the critical importance of institutional structures capable of translating formal rights into tangible support mechanisms. The comparative analysis of jurisdictions such as Sweden and the Netherlands illustrates that the codification of victim rights, while necessary, is insufficient without the establishment of integrated support services, specialised legal representation, and systematic professional training (van Dijk, 2009). These jurisdictions exemplify how a victim-centred orientation within institutional frameworks fosters not only compliance with international norms but also enhances the practical realisation of victims' rights. However, the analysis also reveals that even in systems with progressive legislation, challenges persist in achieving equitable access to protection services, particularly for marginalised and vulnerable populations. Serbia and other transitional societies exemplify the difficulties inherent in bridging the gap between legal norms and institutional realities, where limited resources, insufficient training, and residual cultural barriers impede the full operationalisation of victim-centred justice (Ćopić & Šaćiri, 2020; Luković Radaković, 2024). This disparity highlights the critical role of institutional capacity-building, resource allocation, and continuous professional development as non-negotiable components of any effective victim protection regime.

The second question, focusing on the role of multidisciplinary and trauma-informed approaches, brings into sharper relief the transformative potential of these models in enhancing victim protection and reducing secondary victimisation. Empirical evidence from Germany, Canada, and Australia demonstrates that trauma-informed practices, such as sensitive interviewing techniques, victim accompaniment services, and the use of remote testimony, not only alleviate the psychological burdens faced by victims but also contribute to higher rates of victim participation and satisfaction with the legal process (Herman, 2003; Haverkamp & Hohendorf, 2023; Lloyd et al., 2023). Moreover, the integration of problem-solving courts, as explored by Tešović (2024), offers a paradigmatic example of how therapeutic jurisprudence can be operationalised to address the complex needs of victims. By fostering multidisciplinary collaboration among legal professionals, psychologists, and social workers, problem-solving courts create a more supportive and responsive judicial environment, thereby enhancing both procedural justice and substantive outcomes.

Nonetheless, the implementation of these approaches is not without challenges. Resource constraints, institutional resistance, and concerns about the potential erosion of defendants' procedural rights must be carefully managed. A balanced approach is required, one that safeguards due process while simultaneously ensuring that victims are not subjected to further harm through their engagement with the justice system (Campbell et al., 2024; McGlynn & Westmarland, 2019).

In light of these findings, several policy recommendations emerge as critical for advancing victim protection:

- 1) First, there is an urgent need to institutionalise trauma-informed training for all actors within the criminal justice system - including police officers, prosecutors, defence attorneys, and judges. Such training must go beyond formal compliance to foster genuine attitudinal change, equipping legal professionals with the skills and sensitivities necessary to engage constructively with victims.
- 2) Second, jurisdictions should establish multidisciplinary victim support centres, modelled on best practices from Sweden and the Netherlands, to provide comprehensive services under one roof. These centres should offer legal assistance, psychological counselling, social support, and protective services, thereby minimising the procedural burden on victims and enhancing accessibility.
- 3) Third, national action plans must be developed to ensure the uniform implementation of victim rights, with particular attention to addressing disparities in service provision across urban and rural areas. These plans should be informed by regular empirical evaluations and grounded in participatory consultations with victims and victim advocacy organisations.
- 4) Fourth, sustainable funding mechanisms must be secured to support victim services, recognising that underfunding not only undermines the effectiveness of existing programs but also signals a lack of political commitment to victim protection.
- 5) Fifth, public education campaigns are essential for challenging societal stereotypes and fostering a culture of victim empowerment. Drawing on the successes of campaigns in Australia and Spain, such initiatives should aim to dismantle victim-blaming narratives and promote positive representations of victims within the public consciousness.

Finally, while restorative justice programs hold promise as complementary mechanisms for addressing the psychological needs of victims, their implementation must be carefully structured to ensure voluntariness, safeguard against power imbalances, and maintain the integrity of the legal process (McGlynn & Westmarland, 2019).

Collectively, these recommendations advocate for a comprehensive, multi-layered approach to victim protection, one that transcends formalistic legal reforms and engages with the deeper institutional and cultural dynamics that shape victims' experiences of justice. Only through such an integrated strategy can justice systems move towards fulfilling their dual obligations: to uphold the rights of the accused and to ensure that victims are treated with the dignity, respect, and support they rightfully deserve.

A comparative look at adversarial and inquisitorial legal systems reveals structural differences in the role and rights of victims. In inquisitorial systems, such as those in Sweden or the Netherlands, victims tend to have a more active role in proceedings, supported by integrated legal and social services (Bosma et al., 2021; Victim Support Europe, 2024). In contrast, adversarial systems like those in the UK, Canada, and Australia have introduced complementary mechanisms – such as problem-solving courts or formal victim statements – to enhance victim participation without disrupting the procedural balance (Lloyd et al., 2023; Holder, 2018; McGlynn & Westmarland, 2019). These systemic differences influence not only procedural rights but also the level of institutional support available to victims.

A review of these jurisdictions reveals a pattern that transcends procedural classifications. In inquisitorial systems, the structural integration of victim services, such as the provision of legal counsel, early psychological support, and trauma-informed professionals, is not merely a normative feature but correlates with higher levels of victim satisfaction, retention in proceedings, and reduced secondary victimisation. Conversely, adversarial systems, traditionally marked by the exclusion of victims from core courtroom processes, have responded through auxiliary innovations like problem-solving courts and restorative justice programs that aim to restore victim agency without undermining procedural safeguards (Seacrest, 2023). However, the effectiveness of these reforms often hinges less on their existence and more on how coherently they are embedded into broader institutional frameworks. This suggests that systemic design and implementation capacity play a decisive role in shaping victims' meaningful participation.

Conclusion

The protection of crime victims stands at the intersection of law, policy, and societal values, revealing the intricate interplay between formal legal rights and their substantive realisation in practice. This study has demonstrated that while significant strides have been made in codifying victims' rights at the international and national levels, the mere existence of legislative frameworks is insufficient to ensure meaningful protection. The answers to the research questions posed at the outset are clear: effective victim protection depends not solely on the adoption of legal norms but equally on the establishment of robust institutional infrastructures and the cultivation of multidisciplinary, trauma-informed practices that prioritise victim well-being.

Comparative analyses of jurisdictions such as Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany, Canada, and Australia underscore the critical importance of comprehensive support structures that extend beyond the courtroom, integrating legal, psychological, and social services in a coordinated manner. These models exemplify best practices that mitigate secondary victimisation and enhance victims' trust and engagement with the justice system. In contrast, experiences from transitional contexts like Serbia highlight the enduring challenges of operationalising victim-centred justice in environments marked by institutional inertia and cultural resistance.

Moreover, the findings emphasise that societal attitudes play an indispensable role in shaping victims' experiences of justice. Efforts to combat secondary victimisation must confront the pervasive cultural narratives that blame and marginalise victims, necessitating sustained educational initiatives and public awareness campaigns alongside procedural reforms.

The adoption of trauma-informed and problem-solving judicial models represents a paradigmatic shift from adversarial, offender-centred conceptions of justice to more holistic, inclusive frameworks that recognise and address the complex realities of victimisation. However, realising the full potential of these models requires political will, sustained investment, and an unwavering commitment to institutional and cultural transformation.

Ultimately, the path toward a truly victim-centred justice system demands an integrated, multifaceted strategy, in fact, the one that harmonises legal, institutional, and societal reforms. Only by embracing such a comprehensive approach can justice systems fulfil their fundamental obligation:

to deliver not merely formal justice but substantive healing, empowerment, and respect to those who have suffered harm. In doing so, they reaffirm the core principles of accountability, fairness, and human dignity that lie at the heart of the rule of law.

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Zaštita žrtava krivičnih dela u savremenim pravosudnim sistemima: Pravni okviri, institucionalne inovacije i društveni izazovi

Zaštita žrtava krivičnih dela postala je centralni stub savremenih pravosudnih sistema, uz rastući konsenzus o potrebi poštovanja prava, dostojanstva i dobrobiti žrtava. Ovaj rad kritički razmatra pravne, institucionalne i društvene aspekte zaštite žrtava, sa fokusom na raskorak između formalnih prava i njihove primene u praksi. Komparativnim uvidima iz različitih pravosudnih sistema analiziraju se efikasnost multidisciplinarnih i trauma-informisanih pristupa, kao i potencijal problem-solving i restorativnih modela pravde u unapređenju pravosuđa usmerenog žrtvama. Rezultati ukazuju da su za efektivnu zaštitu potrebni ne samo čvrsti pravni okviri, već i integrisana institucionalna podrška, društvene promene i kontinuirana edukacija profesionalaca. Na osnovu analize, rad formuliše preporuke za politike usmerene na unapređenje zaštite žrtava u savremenim pravosudnim okvirima.

Ključne reči: zaštita žrtava, sekundarna viktimizacija, trauma-informisano pravosuđe, multidisciplinarni pristup, problem-solving sudovi

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