Editorial

13% of sexual assault and rape victims do not report to the police and do not speak up about the violence they have suffered. Based on research, the reasons are manifold: shame; inability to fully grasp, accept and share with others what has happened to them; fear to come out in the open, particularly when the perpetrator is a family member or spouse; fear of reprisal and more. Although there is no single factor influencing reporting or lack thereof, certain reasons may carry more weight for certain victims and/or in certain socio-cultural, political, national or local contexts. As part of our recent Facebook campaign on sexual assault, we asked our followers to tell us why they thought that 13% of victims of sexual violence do not report the abuse. Below are some of their answers:

‘Because they (be sexual violence victims, domestic violence, psychological violence, etc.) don’t get anywhere with justice or justice takes decades to take its course or worse than that, they are likely to end up the ones who asked for it!’

‘Because there is no proper protection for the victim and if they talk the situation would get worse ....one of the biggest obstacles is the time it takes to the case to be closed’

‘I didn’t because the police would blame me or not believe me’

‘Because they are not taken seriously’

‘Very simple, they don’t have support.’

In the comments, reference to lack of trust in the authorities and in the criminal justice system prevailed. According to the majority of people who engaged with our post, victims are scared they won’t be believed and might even be blamed by the police. Even if they report, they won’t be provided with adequate protection and will find themselves ‘stuck’ in lengthy and energy-consuming judicial processes. Trust in the police and authorities more generally is a widespread issue in Europe and internationally. In the UK, a wealth of academic research has addressed the question of trust in the police, both in relation to the general population and minority groups. Criminological research in the UK and US has looked into the gendered and racialized processes of the criminal justice system, ranging from police attitudes towards female victims of rape and sexual assault to stigmatization of women, particularly black and minority women at the hand of lawyers, judges and juries. In Malta, research on these issues is still severely lacking. Many NGOs, Victim Support Malta included, and other entities regularly organise targeted trainings for criminal justice officials, yet the outcomes of such trainings are difficult to measure. There is an urgent need for victims’ experiences of the criminal justice system to be heard, for academic and non-academic research to shed light on the issue of trust and factors that may be infringing it, as well as on the functioning of the criminal justice system more generally. All victims should be able to report freely and feel that their grievances are taken seriously. No victim of sexual assault and rape should be afraid of being shamed, embarrassed or humiliated by the very people who are supposed to be there to help.

Upcoming Events

There are no upcoming events. If you would like to organise a fundraiser for us, please get in touch via our Facebook page, or send us an email on isotta@victimsupport.org.mt

What have we been up to?

Dr. Roberta Lepre attended the Victim Support Europe Annual Conference 2017 in Dublin, Ireland.

Krista Tabone delivered a talk for the staff at Atlas Insurance on how to identify signs of DV, sexual assault, usury and other crimes and how to offer support as friends and colleagues.
Testimonial
Interview with Margot, a former VSM Intern

Hi Margot, can you tell us a bit about yourself, where you’re from, your studies and interests?

I’m Margot, I’m 25 years old and I’m from Belgium. I studied Political Sciences and International Relations. I’m interested in the non-profit sector, in particular, in NGOs which fight all kinds of discrimination.

How and why did you end up interning in Malta with VSM?
I’m really interested in social causes and I want to contribute to help others. That’s why I chose to intern with VSM, which supports victim of crime. This internship has allowed me to get more knowledge on several topics such as violence against women, sexual assault, bullying, child abuse.

What were your main tasks?
My tasks included providing administrative and practical support to the PR and Projects Coordinator on various projects (e.g. Together against Bullying; One Billion Rising, Project Watch Out), liaising with local stakeholders, conducting research on relevant topics, attending meetings and trainings, researching and drafting social media and web content.

What did you enjoy the most about working as an Intern at VSM?
The TEAM!! Roberta, Isotta, Krista, other Interns and the all people I met there, who were so nice. They took the time to explain and involve me in some projects. They also helped me during my daily work. I was definitely inspired by them.

Do you think the internship provided you with some useful skills that might be useful for future employment?
The most useful things I have learned for future employment are skills related to project management and community engagement.

Would you recommend interning at VSM and if yes, why?
As an Intern, you will get real work experience, you will feel useful, you will help victims of crime and you will contribute to improve the Maltese society. If you want to have a good experience in a good organisation, VSM it is the place to be.

Would you like to volunteer with us?
Get in touch for more information!

Media
Efforts to set up a neighbourhood watch program can be initiated by community members themselves, and luckily, getting a scheme up and running isn’t as hard as it seems - Read more here.

The dark web has opened up a host of opportunities for law-breakers, somewhat revolutionising crime as traditionally conceived. Although cybercrime is punishable by law, law enforcement agencies worldwide are often lacking adequate training and resources to prevent, mitigate and respond to criminal offences occurring online. Read more here.

Many women experience fear when walking home alone at night. A recent survey conducted in the UK by the Age Concern charity found that 47% of over-75s are too afraid to go outdoors after dark. Watch a short video here.

Q&A’s
I don’t want to turn up in court as a witness and face the offender! What can I do?

As the victim, you may make a request to avoid being physically present before the accused when giving evidence. You can make the request through your lawyer or through the prosecuting officer. This may be a verbal request.

Your contact with the offender will be minimized if necessary. The court can establish conditions to enable avoidance of contact between yourself and the offender such as having separate waiting areas. Moreover, you are entitled to demand specialized communication technology such as video-conferencing, telephone or Internet, unless the physical presence of the interpreter is required in order to properly exercise your rights or to understand the proceedings.

Announcements
After 9 years serving as Director of Victim Support Malta, Dr. Roberta Lepre is stepping down from the post. Ms. Krista Tabone, who has been working as Services Coordinator with VSM since 2013, will be replacing her.

We have launched our Project Watch Out page! Project Watch Out aims to train communities in how to stay safe and organize themselves locally to prevent crime. Find out more here.

A big thank you to Atlas Insurance for raising 700 € for VSM!