

Standards for victim support

Quality standards for a professional support of crime victims

Standards for qualified victim support

The victim support task force (ado) is a union of different, professionally working victim support institutions in Germany.

It is the goal of all institutions to support people who have become a crime victim, either in partisanship with the victim or trying to achieve a conflict settlement between offender and victim.

In ado, institutions from the following working areas work together:

- Information centres for female and male crime victims (victim support institutions)
- Information centres for victims of crimes with a politically right background
- Establishments supporting and looking after victims of anti-homosexual violence
- Establishments, with whose help a conflict settlement and/or compensation between victim and offender can be reached

The present victim support standards were developed by an ado work group. With it, we wish to make a contribution to the discussion about quality criteria and standards for effective victim support.

The victim support standards are therefore not to be understood as final and binding. We rather identified, based on the concrete needs

of crime victims, conceptual demands, e.g. concerning the working methods and principles of the victim support institutions.

In order to meet these conditions in practice, certain institutionalized framework conditions concerning the personnel and room equipment, as well as financing, are needed.

Particular emphasis was given to the conceptual aspects as well as the framework conditions which we consider absolutely necessary for qualified victim support. They belong to the “Must-category”, meaning they are a prerequisite for qualified victim support.

The aspects belonging to the „Should-category“ are in our opinion important and desirable, but not necessary in many cases. With this, we wish to take adequate account of the sometimes rather different victim support institutions.

All member organizations of ado feel obliged to implement the victim support standards in their concrete daily counseling work or to work towards the implementation of the goals.

It is our common goal to establish and secure the quality standards for professional victim support. Crime victims are entitled to qualified advice and counseling, not only in a moral but also in a socio-political sense.

1. Form of organization of the victim support institutions

Victim Support has to be provided by institutes run by independent service providers (non-profit association) in order to secure the contentional and structural independence of the organization.

The articles of association must show that the work follows the general and individual needs and interests of the victim. The advisory activity is taking the victim's side, but is not unilaterally at the offender's cost.

The organizational and contentional independence has to be guaranteed also in the context of the location. Victim support institutions may only then be located in public authority or state buildings if these agree on the conceptual contents and do not conflict with the victim's interests (e.g. witness room).

The victim support institutions fulfill the function of an information and counseling centre. An integration into the local social infrastructure (network) is necessary.

The structure of the association has to be planned with a clear division of work between the board and the employees. The board of the association shall overtake tasks such as management, financing and representation, whereas the mediation of work contents according to the requirements takes place between board and employees.

At the information centre, positions have to be filled by qualified full-time employees. Additionally, unpaid employees and temporary workers can be employed in certain fields of work, as long as they have the necessary qualification.

2. Conception und principles

According to the statute a target group - specific conception has to be developed:

The main principles of victim support are:

- Character of the offer
- Voluntariness
- Confidentiality
- on request anonymity
- Free counseling
- exclusive orientation along the needs of the victim:
 - nothing may happen without the expressed consent of the affected.
 - granting of support independent of the reporting of the offence

Victim support is interdisciplinary and holistic and can consist of:

- clarification of conflicts
- psycho-social counseling, crisis intervention
- long-term support and therapeutic complement for: individuals, couples, groups, relatives of the victims and self-help groups (also gender-specific)
- legal advice
- accompaniment and support of the victim's witnesses and the witnesses in the frame of criminal and civil proceedings
- Victim-Offender-Mediation or conflict mediation

The advisory work can be part of a whole range of offers of a single institution or can be guaranteed through connecting with another,

more adequate information centre or occupational group (network concept).

3. Human resources

Human resources have to be adjusted according to the concept and contentional offering, as well as between the board and the employees. Usually, four work areas can be defined: management, counseling, public relations and administration.

3.1. Management

If the management is not run by the honorary board, this task can be delegated to full-time employees. This means for these employees:

- (1) Exemption of the counseling and advisory work to an appropriate extent
- (2) Exact contractual regulations (job description, rules of procedure of the association, addition to the employment contract) concerning responsibility and liability, as well as legal consequences
- (3) Adequate payment

In the case of the delegation to full-time employees, the maintenance of the advisory offers and counseling services should be guaranteed to the usual extent through the extension of human resources.

3.2. Advice / counseling

The counseling team should consist of a minimum of three full-time employees (possibly mixed-sex). Through this, the following aspects shall be secured:

- Availability of the emergency service during the opening times, double employees / one person “in reserve”, possibly the choice between man and woman (if target group – specific counseling, e.g. hotlines for women, gay switchboard etc.)
- avoidance of waiting times, adequate counseling time (including preparation and revision)
- Offers have to be covered even at short notice (e.g. crisis intervention, accompaniment to court/hearing, psycho-social accompaniment in the further processing)
- Flexibility concerning making appointments
- Cooperation with other institutions and relevant occupational groups, sufficient knowledge of the social network (institute- and client-related) has to be present

The full-time employees have to have the occupational qualification needed for the work area (e.g. through studies).

The holistic interdisciplinary approach to victim support intended in the concept can be reached through the composition of the advisory team and/or through a network with other institutions and occupational groups.

In addition to the full-time employees qualified voluntary employees and temporary workers can be employed. A continuous training and professional support have to be guaranteed.

All members of staff have to show the willingness to acquire additional qualifications according to their work area:

- qualified introduction, training and theoretical deepening of the victims' problems
- practice oriented further training

To maintain and further develop the professional qualifications a team- and case supervision has to be guaranteed.

A thorough choice of employees concerning their possible personal victim experiences, their psychical stress capacity and their personal motivation to work in victim support is necessary.

3.3. Public relations

Next to the concrete victim support public relations sometimes belongs to the main tasks of the advisory team. Members of the association or the board can also be integrated in adequate publicly effective measures.

Public relations can consist of:

- Information of the public about the respective institution
- Public advocacy for the needs of crime victims (educational- and lobby work)
- Sensitization for the special life situation of the victims, especially among occupational groups and institutions who are in contact with the victims
- Information events on victim-specific topics and prevention measures (e.g. victim rights, effective self protection strategies etc.)

Of high importance is the networking- and disseminator work in regional and nationwide work groups with regard to an aimed improvement of the life situation and the position of crime victims in the criminal proceeding.

The biased commitment for the rights of crime victims can lead to massive criticism on the criminal proceedings practice of the police

and justice and therefore calls for the independence of the employees and the victim support institutions of the state institutions.

Within public relations it has to be observed that victims are not functionalized for the interests of a third party, that the commitment for victims' rights is not directed against offenders' rights and that through the ways of information brokerage the fear of crime among the population is not rising.

Especially in the contact with the media it has to be observed that the anonymity of the clients is guaranteed and that an intensive preparation of the journalists is implemented before they will be brought into contact with the victim, or that the conversation takes place with an employee present.

3.4. Administration

Administrative capacities should be sufficiently present so that the work areas „Advice / Counseling“ and „Public relations“ is not burdened with administrative tasks. From experience the administrative work is growing with the growing tasks of the institution.

The area of responsibility of the administration includes the organization of the office and the correspondence- and telephone service.

Contacting the information centre by phone has to be possible during opening times. The telephone service should furthermore enable a parallel held advisory and counseling service.

The extent of the duties and the strict separation of administrative work, advisory and counseling service and public relations require

mostly two part-time administrative jobs in order to avoid bottlenecks (holidays, illness, further training).

The qualification of the employees in the administration should consist of:

- Basic qualification, e.g. administrative training
- Enhancement of qualifications, e.g. computer literacy
- Social competence

4. Location and equipment

The premises should be located centrally and independent of state or official buildings (e.g. city centre), as far as the conception is not calling for anything else. Realistic rents have to be considered in the fixing of the financial requirements.

Present have to be:

- (1) For each advisor / counselor a private office with adequate equipment for consultations, possibly a computer.
- (2) A combination of administrative- and waiting area, equipped with: computers, telephone system, fax, photocopier, lockable filing cabinets, shredder (privacy)
- (3) A large room equipped according to the contentional offer and the possibility to modify the room (e.g. during relaxation exercises, for self help groups, individual consultation, events, general meetings)
- (4) Kitchen/social room and separate toilets
- (5) Storage room/basement for file storage and informational material, library

Further demands on the premises:

- The rooms should be bright and arranged in a way that a disturbance-free counseling is possible (therefore no transit rooms)
- A “homely“ basic equipment shall create a pleasant atmosphere (confidence building)

5. Financial requirements and financing

The financing of the information centre has to be secured in the long term. A constant struggle for financial security binds unnecessary capacities, has a negative influence on the employees' motivation and influences the quality of the advice and the counseling.

The financial framework should include at least three advisory/counseling jobs and two part-time administrative jobs. All employees have to receive adequate payment due to their respective job description according to BAT. This also applies to overtime which cannot be compensated through compensatory holidays. If needed, the employment of temporary workers should be possible financially.

Financial means for the regular and qualified supervision and further education, as well as for educational/therapeutic aids and resources have to be integrated into the budget.
über einen solide finanzierten Haushalt abgedeckt sein.

All further running costs, e.g. rent and materials, but mostly costs for public relations have to be covered by a solidly financed budget.