

The Daily Star

Committed to PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO KNOW

Wednesday, June 18, 2008 11:59 AM GMT+06:00

Published On: 2008-06-09

[Print Friendly Version](#)

Star City

Helping out victims of criminal offence

Victim Support Centres to be set up at police stations

Durdana Ghias

In a groundbreaking initiative the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) with the aid of Police Reform Programme (PRP) of UNDP is going to introduce a full-fledged centre for helping out victims of criminal offence.

Under the Victim Support Service victims seeking police help will get all kinds of legal and medical assistance while human rights activists, NGOs and social workers will extend cooperation to police personnel.

This is for the first time that Bangladesh police and NGOs are working together for a common cause and under the same roof.

At present almost all police stations in the city have service delivery officers who attend those coming to the police to file a case. They handle normal or non-severe cases. But the job of the Victim Support Centre (VSC) will be to handle severely traumatised victims. Mostly female police officers will be engaged in delivering this service.

The service is expected to open in the next two months. To start the programme 33 police personnel and NGO workers have been given a 10-day training on how to deal with a victim, how to interview or respect him/her, FIR writing, understanding victim's mental state, studying the constitution on victim's right and other related things.

"The concept of victim support centre is new in Bangladesh. Generally people are not used to imagine police as someone very helpful but we are going to change the picture through proactive policing," said Farid Ahmed, public relation officer, PRP.

Initially the service will start in two rooms at the Tejgaon Police Station. The future target of the programme is to open VSC at 600 police stations across the country. To widen the programme the 33 trained people will work to train others.

"By the time we start VSC at Tejgaon PS we will be able to assess the reality like how much manpower, funds, doctors, psychologists, ambulances and logistics we need to run a centre like this," said Farid.

"Victims will always have a contact with the centre and if the former victims want they can work as volunteers," he said.



Police stations already have service delivery desks. Soon there will be Victim Support Centres to help out victims of criminal offences. Photo: STAR

Police do not have specialised knowledge in some cases like handling traumatised victims. So they will take the help of a psychologist. The NGOs working in the field of helping rape victims, acid victims and other victims will assist police.

Sohel Rana Akhond, one of the trainees and senior reintegration officer, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA), said, "After the training with police we realised that some jobs were done by both the police and the NGOs. So there was some overlapping. If we work together then we will be able to avoid the overlapping."

"At the VSC the victims will be able to ask the on-duty officers about his rights," he added.

Hubert Staberhofer, an investigation, prosecution and operation expert and programme manager, PRP, said, the perspectives of police and NGOs will be different while dealing with victims. Police are used to help on legal sides and NGOs are supposed to assist in taking care. But at the centre it will be a combined approach from both sides.

"Talking with the victim is a part of the investigation because he can reveal many vital information to apprehend the offender. A traumatised victim needs time to recover before talking with the police. He will not be able to reveal much information if he remains traumatised. He may need a few days before talking with the police. This period is called reflection time. A psychologist can help him recover from this trauma and help police in investigating the case," said Staberhofer.

Asked how they got two different groups of people like police and NGOs in one place, he said, "At first we started with both groups separately. After a few days we put them together. At first they were sceptic but then gradually the ice started to break and they discovered arrays of common interests and expertise. They found out that they were dealing the same problem just in a different way."

"We are trying to changed police attitude towards a victim. It is a long way to go but I think it is possible especially after the introduction of service delivery system as many police personnel said their self-esteem increased when the victims turned to them for help," he said.

Muminunnessa Shikha, victim support specialist, PRP, said a steering committee will be formed after the inception of the programme to monitor the project on a monthly basis.

PRP is going to follow the models of Nepal and Thailand in introducing this service, sources said.