

Victims say stopping re-offending is more important than prison

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A new survey published today (16 January 2006) from SmartJustice and Victim Support gives a unique insight into how victims think the criminal justice system should deal with people who commit non-violent crimes. The findings challenge many pre-conceived ideas that victims always want heavy penalties such as prison. Instead, they support a range of measures which they believe are more effective in stopping further offending.

The most striking finding of the research, conducted by ICM, was that eight out of ten (80%) victims think that more constructive activities for young people in the community and better supervision by parents would be effective in stopping re-offending. Seven out of ten victims also want to see more treatment programmes in the community for offenders suffering from mental health problems, and for drug addicts, to tackle the causes of non-violent crime. Among the key findings from the poll, which asked how non-violent crimes like shoplifting, car theft and vandalism can be reduced, were:

- two-thirds (62%) of victims think that going to prison does not prevent re-offending
- more than half (54%) were in favour of making offenders work in the community - in schools, old people's homes or parks - to stop them returning to crime
- 51% of victims were also in support of making offenders meet their victims to make amends personally.

Lucie Russell, Director of SmartJustice, said: "This is the first ever survey of victims' views about non-violent crime. It's clear from the survey that most victims don't believe that prison produces law-abiding citizens. There is strong support for measures to improve parenting, more constructive activities for young people, more drug treatment for addicts and more mental health provision. What most people seem to want is not retribution but effective ways to prevent the next victim".

Peter Dunn, Head of Research & Development at Victim Support, said: "Victims are often assumed to be vengeful towards offenders and favour harsh punishments. This is misleading. Most victims, while feeling angry about what has happened to them, want the offender to stop offending both against them and against other people. This research confirms that a lot of victims are interested in the prospect of constructive work being done with offenders to prevent their further offending. It shows that many victims of crime want effective measures to tackle the root causes of offending, which involves more than vengeance and punishment for its own sake".

For more information go to

Source: www.victimsupport.org.uk

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