

The goals of probation, parole, and community-based corrections are protection of the community and reintegration of the offender. Both goals have become increasingly difficult to accomplish in recent years because caseloads have increased dramatically. A single case manager may work with as many as 300 probationers or parolees (American Correctional Association, 2007). In addition, because of the overcrowding in prisons, many violent criminals are being released early. The social work case manager must find a balance between support for the client's successful reentry into the community and a level of supervision that protects the community.

Victim Assistance Services

In addition to working with offenders, social workers also assist victims of crime. A **victim** is not only the person against whom a criminal offense has been committed but also, if that person has been killed or incapacitated, his or her spouse, parent, child, family, or other lawful representative.

CASE EXAMPLE

Less than 24 hours after the school shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado (see Chapter 11), American Red Cross social workers and other mental health professionals from California to Utah were en route. All were certified to provide services to victims of traumatic events. Their immediate goal was to provide crisis intervention services to the students, teachers, and parents, who were all victims. Their longer-term objectives were to reassure the victims of their safety and to help them express their thoughts, feelings, and reactions. The social workers hoped to provide victims with information and assistance that would help them deal with the aftermath of the tragedy.

Criminal victimization is physically, psychologically, and financially devastating. Victims may develop emotional problems, including intense anger, fear, isolation, low self-esteem, depression, and helplessness (Kopiec, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2004). The financial effects often include missing work as a result of physical and psychological injuries, paying for expensive medical treatment, having to replace or repair property, and paying for therapy. Survivors of prolonged or repeated criminal victimization, such as battered women and abused children, often suffer from debilitating emotional distress. When these crime victims seek help, they are often revictimized or stigmatized by the criminal justice system, and sometimes even by friends and family members who are overwhelmed by their own anger, guilt, and fear (Davis, Taylor, & Bench, 1994). This has been particularly true for rape victims (see Box 13.3).

Social workers in victim assistance are advocates and counselors. They need to be skilled in advocacy, negotiation, mediation, and crisis intervention (Roberts, 1995). They must know how to prepare victim impact statements,

Box 13.3 More About...Victim Assistance

Social workers are on call at the Rape Treatment Center at Santa Monica—UCLA Medical Center 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They provide long-term counseling, information, and referrals for rape victims and their families. They also help educate medical, law enforcement, criminal justice, judiciary, school, and other personnel about the particular traumas associated with rape. Social workers support victims throughout the investigation of the crime and the prosecution of the perpetrator.

victim compensation forms, and applications for emergency monetary assistance for food and shelter. They must also be able to facilitate victim-offender mediation. Most victim assistance programs are housed in prosecutors' offices, hospitals, police and fire departments, sheriffs' offices, and nonprofit organizations.

Crisis intervention skills are critical for social workers in criminal justice contexts. Social workers respond to all kinds of emergencies, including rape, homicide, suicide, and death notification, to name a few. Crisis intervention—the mobilization of needed resources in emergency situations—can help prevent further disruption at the crime scene and help victims immediately begin to deal with the trauma (Hendricks & Byers, 1996).

After the immediate effect of the crisis has been dealt with, the client needs ongoing support. Eventually, referral for longer-term counseling services may be necessary. This is particularly true when children are victims of crime and experience traumatic crisis. They are the primary victims in cases of child abuse and gang violence, and they can also be secondary victims. For example, children may be traumatized if they witness spousal abuse or see their parents abusing drugs. Children who witness violent acts are at risk to become violent themselves as they grow older (Frank, 2000); this makes early intervention even more critical.

For social workers to effectively intervene in a crisis situation with a child, they must understand how children think and develop. Social workers use play therapy, puppets, dolls, and drawings to help children tell their stories and express their emotions. For example, after a four-year-old witnessed her mother's murder in a shopping mall parking lot, she was unable to say more than that a man killed her mother. However, the child was able to use a toy shopping mall, a toy parking lot, and dolls to reenact the events that led up to and followed the murder (Goodman, 1984).

Policy Issues **LO6**



EP 5a

The social work profession's goal in dealing with criminal justice is to serve the public interest by developing, advocating for, and implementing effective public policies. This section identifies some of the most critical policy issues that criminal justice social workers are confronting in the early twenty-first century.