



How is victim support evolving in the face of “Cults 2.0” ?

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Coll

History of the “cults” problem in Belgium:

- 1996 setting up of a parliamentary commission “... aimed at developing a policy to combat the illegal practices of cults and the danger they represent for society and for individuals, particularly minors”
- Creation of the Centre for Information and Advice on Harmful Sectarian Organizations (CIAOSN) by the law of 02/06/1998
- **Missions**: information ☐ studies ☐ documentation centre ☐ support and guidance

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- 1997 creation of the “Cults” team within the Gendarmerie (BSR of BRUSSELS)
Missions : computer graphics of cults operating in Belgium that pose a threat to public order ☐ judicial investigations ☐ reference point for other police services
- 2001 policy reform: “Cults” team integrated into the Anti-terrorist Unit of the Judicial Police of BRUSSELS
- March 2016 : attacks in BRUSSELS (32 dead/340 injured) ☐ team reoriented towards terrorist investigations ☐ gradual abandonment of the cult issue
- Ditto for State Security

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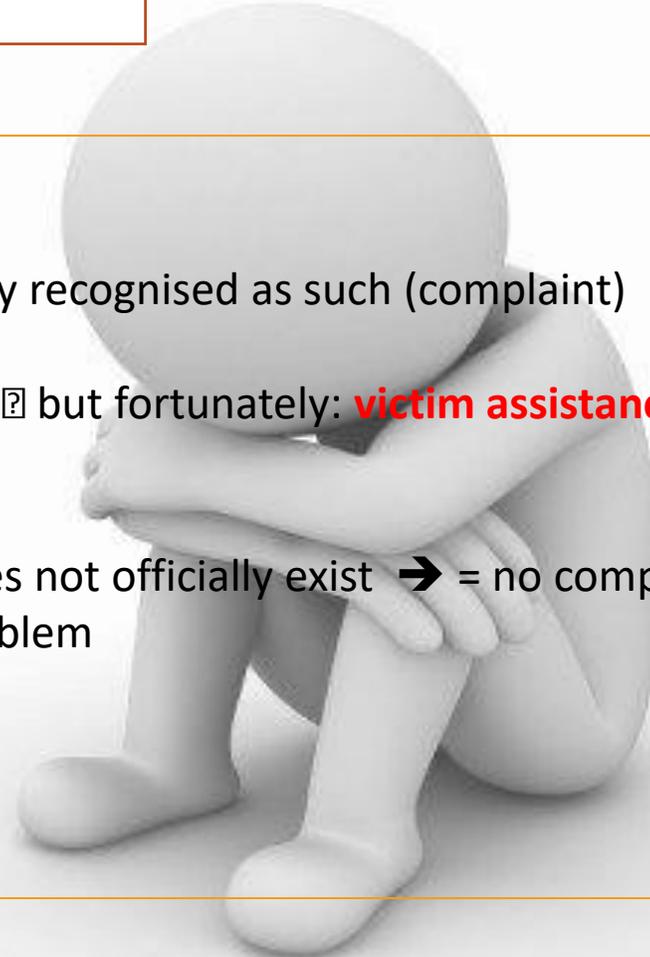
Legal definition of victim:

- *any person who has suffered material, bodily and/or moral damage as a result of an act punishable by criminal law such as crimes, misdemeanours and infractions.*
- **notion of material and financial damage** , moral damage resulting in psychological after-effects due to the offence and physical damage resulting in physical after-effects.
- Criminal procedure and victims' rights = complex areas
- Creation of “victim support units” ☐ judicial assistants
- **Missions** : Inform ☐ Assist ☐ Guide

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Sufficient mechanisms?

- Yes for victims officially recognised as such (complaint)
- Not for “silent victim” ☒ but fortunately: **victim assistance associations** (volunteers)
- But “silent victim” does not officially exist → = no complaint → no victim → no perpetrator → no problem



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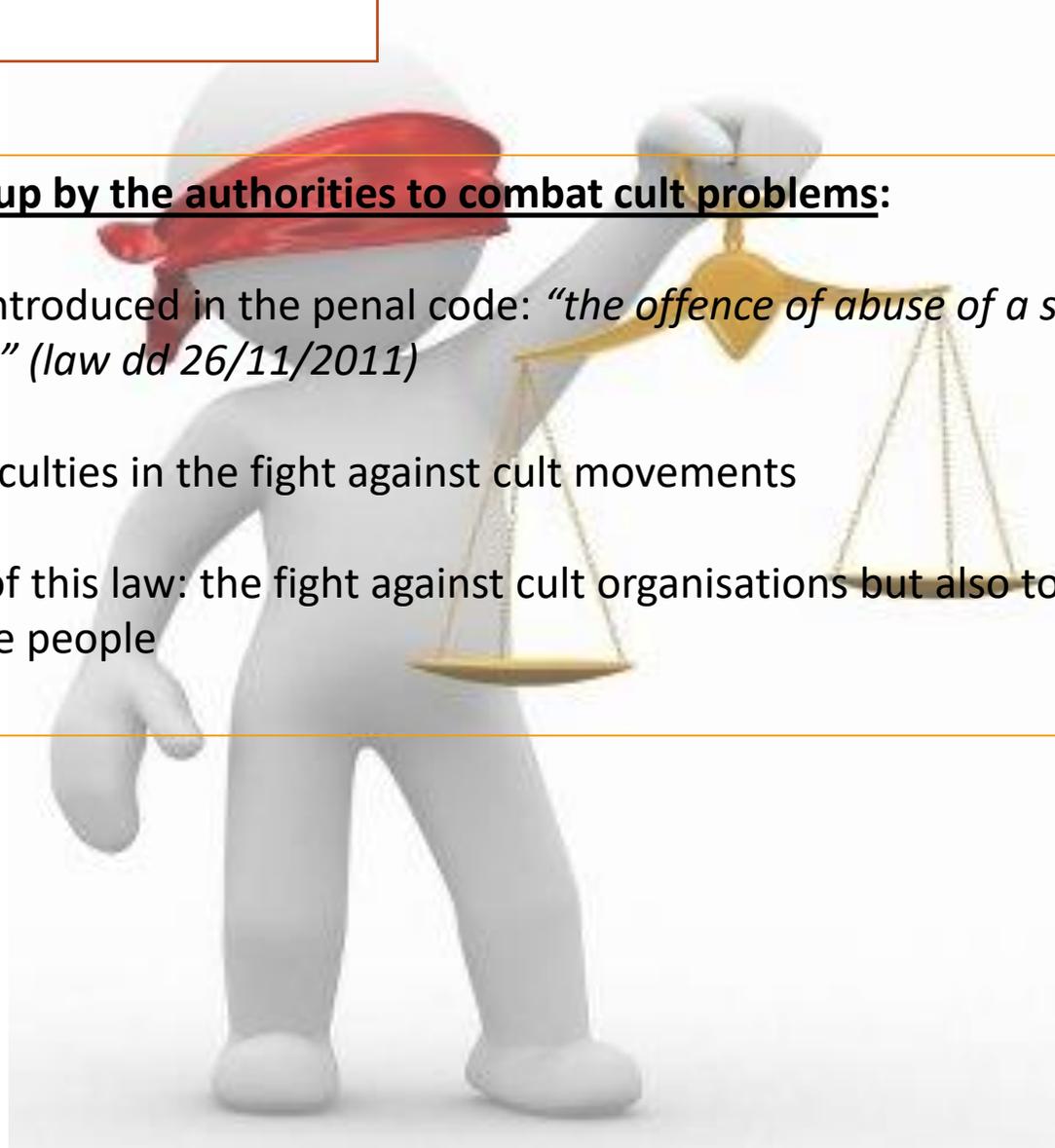
Types of victims in the cult context :

- **Victims who remain unaware** (still active ☐ “honeymooner”)
- **Ex-follower victims** : aware that they have been manipulated ☐ feelings of guilt ☐ risk of over-victimisation if their status is not recognised
- **Victims-perpetrators**: victims who commit a crime but are in a state of subjugation
- **Silent victims** : = no complaint → no victim → no perpetrator → no problem → but suffering!
- **Collateral victims** = the most numerous and the least helped!

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Systems set up by the authorities to combat cult problems:

- Offence introduced in the penal code: *“the offence of abuse of a situation of weakness” (law dd 26/11/2011)*
- Legal difficulties in the fight against cult movements
- Purpose of this law: the fight against cult organisations but also to protect vulnerable people



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- Art. 442quater §1 reads as follows:

“Anyone who, while knowing the situation of physical or psychological weakness of a person, seriously altering this person’s capacity of discernment, fraudulently abused this weakness to lead this person to an act or failure to act seriously affecting their physical or mental integrity or assets, will be punished by a sentence of one month to two years imprisonment and a fine of one hundred Euros to one thousand Euros or one of these penalties only. »

- For application: obligation of knowledge of the situation of weakness by the perpetrator at the time of the acts ☐ interest for application in a cult context

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Evolution of the cult problem in the XXI century :

- “Traditional” cults of the 80s and 90s in decline
- Multiplication of micro-cults (groups composed of a few dozen members), very closed groups, very little visibility for non-members, etc.
- Areas of interest: health, personal development, conspiracy, etc.
- New means of communication: digital platforms, social networks allow 24/24 availability, no more territorial limits, virtual world, etc.

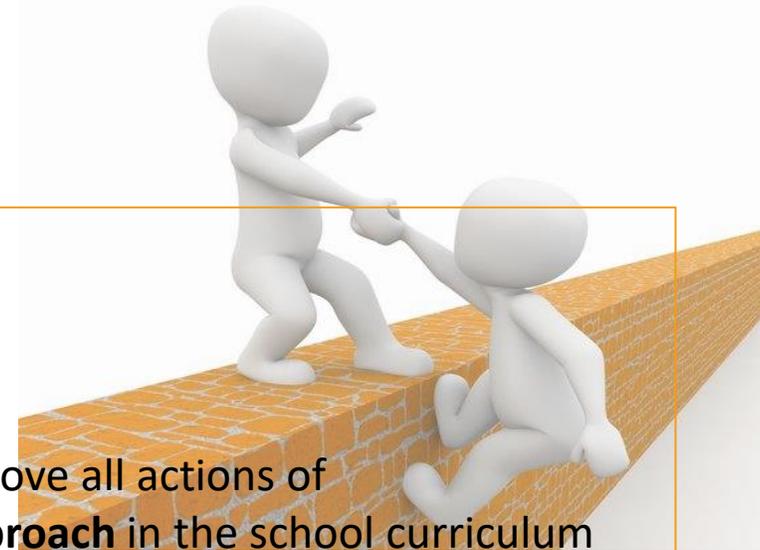
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How to help victims of cults?:

- Prevent them from becoming victims!
- How? ☐ Repression is not very effective but above all actions of prevention/proactivity ☐ teaching a **critical approach** in the school curriculum ...☐ developing analytical ability ...



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*Thank you for
listening*