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Introduction to *Victims of Crime*

The Interaction of Research and Practice

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The real use of all knowledge is this, that we should dedicate it to the use and advantage of man.

Sir Francis Bacon

Perhaps no field has demonstrated the truth of the above comment more than the area of victimology and victim assistance. From the field's inception in the United States and in the rest of the world, theory and research have interacted closely in the study of crime victims and the establishment of programs and policies to assist victims and ensure

that they are treated with dignity, compassion, and justice. In particular, three types of research have been significant in this interaction. The first documents the scope and nature of criminal victimization and is known as measurement research. The second examines the impact of victimization and has increasingly incorporated research from traumatology. The third

centers on the role of victims in the criminal justice process.

MEASUREMENT RESEARCH

Beginning in 1972, the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), conducted by the Bureau of the Census and the Bureau of Justice Statistics, has provided basic data on victimization rates, the demographic characteristics of victims, and the consequences of victimization. Although the survey has produced crude indicators of many aspects of victimization, NCVS data have focused critical attention on victims and their attributes. Early studies of victims and witnesses, such as Cannavale and Falcon (1976), helped develop victim and witness programs and heighten interest in the relationships among victims, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, judges, and members of the general public.

Over the past thirty years, numerous other victim surveys have broadened our knowledge about who is being victimized and how. Needs assessments are conducted in virtually all victim service programs and help service providers to better direct their efforts and resources. At the same time, researchers have recognized that victims should be involved in both the design and implementation of such surveys. "New" definitions of crimes or kinds of crime, such as bullying, hate or bias crime, identity theft, stalking, and cybercrime have recently been highlighted. In addition, the effects of crime on certain vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, teens, specific cultural minorities, or people with disabilities, are now being seriously studied. As Fattah (1991) noted, victimological surveys belong to the "most exciting developments in criminology."

RESEARCH ON THE TRAUMA OF VICTIMIZATION

Although many early victim assistance programs and victim advocates placed primary

importance on more sensitive treatment for victims in the criminal justice system, their work quickly led them to the conclusion that better treatment went beyond simply changing laws or lending support during court proceedings. This observation was underscored by the fact that 80% of crimes never result in an arrest, and 90% of crimes are never prosecuted. Another question arose: What kind of assistance could be offered to all victims whether the criminal justice system was involved in their case or not? Research by Burgess on rape trauma syndrome and Walker on the battered woman syndrome encouraged investigators to examine more closely the traumatic effects of crime on psychological well-being and adjustment.

Crisis intervention services were incorporated into many programs and emphasized three elements: providing victims with a restored sense of safety and security, giving them an opportunity to tell their story of the event with appropriate reassurance and a validation of their emotional reactions, and helping them solve their immediate problems in the aftermath of the event. These lessons were learned by victim practitioners in their everyday work and affirmed by research from the mental health field. The lessons also led in 1980 to the reformulation of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as described in the third edition of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*.

In the next twenty years, research exploded on two topics, the short-term psychological effects of crises and the long-term mental health impact of trauma. Many of those studies were clinical in nature. Many were also longitudinal studies of specific populations and in-depth interviews of victims, which refined the way practitioners deliver crisis intervention and other types of victim services. Research has taught providers that painful feelings can resurface with the recall of an event. Hence victim advocates argued

that people interviewing victims in the health care or criminal justice systems should possess crisis intervention skills. Research also highlighted the need for long-term psychological services for crime victims.

The description of PTSD in the *DSM-IV* in 1994, which included the subjective perception of the person exposed to a traumatic event, resulted in two critical insights for victim assistance providers. The first confirmed what most practitioners were witnessing among their clients: Not all crime victims suffer a major aftershock from crime. Indeed, it is likely that most do not. Therefore it is important to reevaluate the essential elements of victim service programs. The lesson here was that the central feature of the impact of crime for most victims was a sense that they had lost control over their lives.

The second insight followed from the first. The more an intervener could do to help reestablish that sense of control, the more quickly victims could regain mastery over their lives. In many cases, this meant an emphasis on practical interventions, such as replacement or repair of property, emergency financial assistance, financial compensation or restitution, and helpful reassurance. Surveys of victim needs confirmed this insight. In other cases, this meant finding a positive way to get involved with their case or taking practical action to prevent being revictimized. Surveys not only suggested the therapeutic value that arose from victims' participation in various stages of the judicial system but also indicated the value of crime prevention activities forming an integral component of victim assistance. Research on repeat victimization has strengthened this view among practitioners.

ROLE OF VICTIMS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROCESS

The growing body of research on victims, combined with the advocacy of a growing

victims field, created a new focus on victims within the criminal justice system. Several studies, beginning in the 1970s, found that victims are interested in information about their court cases and that the criminal justice system could benefit from treating victims more compassionately. In addition, many victims wanted their voices to be heard in the adjudication process. Both state and the federal governments enacted laws that accorded victims substantial rights to notification and participation. Thirty years later, victims across the country have the right to notice of critical stages in the criminal justice process, to speak or present written statements at sentencing or parole hearings, and to receive restitution.

THIS VOLUME

The tradition of victim research has encouraged efforts to improve the treatment of crime victims through concrete laws and policies and effective services. As information on the impact of victimization becomes more available and as the definition of crime and victimization expand to address issues of terrorism, genocide, transnational crime, human trafficking, and technological crime, research can continue to enrich our understanding of how we can best identify, respond to, and alleviate human suffering.

The contributions in this volume build on the traditions of measurement research, research on victim trauma, and research on the role of victims in the criminal justice process. Some contributions to this third edition of *Victims of Crime* update, expand, and provide a deeper understanding of topics that appeared in the earlier two editions. Other contributions present new topics, reflecting the dynamic changes that are always occurring in the field of victimization.

We divided the volume into two sections. Selections in the first part summarize research on the prevalence of various types and consequences of victimization. Finkelhor

elucidates the field of developmental victimology, which encourages a comprehensive understanding of crimes against children and adolescents. He describes the nature and extent of victimization across the developmental span of young persons. Finkelhor criticizes lifestyle and routine activities theories as limited perspectives for exploring the victimization of children, and he presents developmental victimology as a comprehensive framework for explaining the causes and effects of victimization in childhood and adolescence. He also suggests specific lines of inquiry to expand our understanding of juvenile victims of crime.

O'Sullivan and Fry examine the prevalence and emotional consequences of sexual violence from infancy to adulthood. They describe how service providers, trying to lend assistance to victims, can unwittingly cause them more distress. They discuss emerging topics such as commercial child sexual exploitation, sex trafficking, marital rape, and rape in prisons. They conclude by summarizing promising new initiatives to support the reporting of sexual assaults and facilitate the prosecution of sex traffickers.

Buzawa's contribution on intimate partner violence provides a comprehensive overview of the problem. She examines the social, legal, and research definitions of intimate partner violence and discusses its prevalence in the United States. In addition, Buzawa explores the pernicious effects of intimate partner violence on various subgroups of victims, which are defined along racial, ethnic, and sociodemographic lines. As the author notes, the consequences of intimate partner violence include financial difficulties, psychological damage, physical injuries, and death.

Tjaden writes about stalking—a topic only recently explored through extensive research on both victims and perpetrators. Tjaden reviews the development of legal responses to stalking in America. She notes that all fifty states and the federal government have

passed legislation that criminalizes stalking. She also discusses research that demonstrates stalking is more prevalent than previously suspected and describes what we know about how it affects victims.

McDevitt, Farrell, Rousseau, and Wolff argue that, as a nation founded on tolerance for group differences, hate crimes threaten our core democratic principles. State and federal legislation designed to measure the prevalence of hate crime and to create additional penalties for such offenses have raised public awareness about the problem. However, as with financial crimes, there is a paucity of rigorous scientific research on the prevalence of crimes against different groups or the effects of these crimes on individuals.

Thompson's chapter on the families of homicide victims points out that, while there is a vast amount of research on crime victims, scanty attention has been given to the impact of violence on secondary or indirect victims. Thompson describes what we know about the psychological, emotional, and behavioral effects of homicide on families and how social support, coping styles, and other resources can help mitigate the ordeal of losing a loved one and dealing with the criminal justice process.

Deem, Nerenberg, and Titus discuss one of the categories of victims that has so far received little attention—victims of financial crimes—fraud, cybercrimes, and identity theft. As the authors point out, victims of financial crimes are critically underserved; in fact, we have little information on the scope of the problem. The authors argue that novel, proactive approaches are needed to help victims recover losses, hold perpetrators accountable, alleviate the adverse consequences of financial crimes, and prevent future victimization.

DiMaggio and Galea discuss the adverse effects of natural and unnatural disasters, focusing on the psychological harm caused by terrorist attacks, especially September 11,

2001, and its impact on victims, rescuers, and direct witnesses involved in the tragedy. They explore, in depth, the correlates, symptoms, and treatment of PTSD and highlight a few of the methodological and research issues that complicate studies on the effects of terrorist acts and other traumatic events. They also examine the characteristics of disaster victims that promote recovery.

Heisler's chapter focuses on elder abuse, a problem that looms larger and results in greater costs to society as the American population ages. The chapter notes that elder abuse can assume several forms: physical harm, emotional damage, financial exploitation, neglect, and abandonment. The author presents brief case studies of each type. Her contribution also discusses the risk factors and indicators of elder abuse, relevant federal and state statutes, and promising programs to address its consequences.

Snowden and Lurigio focus on one particularly understudied and highly vulnerable group of crime victims: persons with mental illness. As they note, rates of victimization among the mentally ill are higher than those found in the general population. Among the mentally ill, the authors review investigations of the prevalence of criminal victimization, the likelihood of reporting crime, the correlates of victimization, and the adverse effects of crime. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of the limitations of research on this topic and the paucity of specialized programs for mentally ill crime victims.

Stein's chapter reviews survey research on peer-to-peer and other forms of sexual harassment in schools. Stein also explores the relationship between sexual harassment and bullying and analyzes the failure to consider the role of gender in our current discourse about bullying.

Daigle, Fisher, and Guthrie describe research on repeat victimization—the tendency for persons victimized once to be victimized again. Their chapter discusses the

prevalence of repeat victimization and what is known about the reasons why some persons suffer multiple victimizations. They also describe promising programs designed to reduce repeat victimizations for crimes as different as burglary and sexual assault.

To round out the first section, Alvazzi de Frate discusses the use of victimization surveys in countries in all parts of the world. Her chapter describes the growing reliance on international victim surveys, the importance of understanding the context of crime and the methodologies of each survey, and the many applications of this research.

The theme of the second section is on various ways to promote recovery from criminal victimization and a return to normal functioning. The section begins with Roberts and Green, who present an overview of the field of crisis intervention. They discuss crisis theory, innovations, and best practices in the field. They describe several crisis intervention models and show how an individual case might be handled using one of the models.

Davis describes the important role that family, friends, and neighbors play in helping victims readjust in the aftermath of crime. His chapter notes that, while help from professionals is necessary for some victim needs, many victim needs are both mundane and immediate, and it is here that those close to victims are in a position to lend assistance. The chapter also observes that, while research suggests that those who support victims often incur costs, they are overwhelmingly glad they helped and would do so again.

The next two chapters highlight different aspects of victim rights. Erez and Roberts discuss victim participatory rights and explore the continuing debate surrounding victims' claim to have a voice in criminal proceedings. They summarize important participatory reforms and consider arguments for and against victim participation in sentencing. They note that research has indicated that the

right to participate in proceedings is important to many crime victims and—contrary to fears in the legal community—does not appear to affect court dispositions and sentences. Howley and Dorris trace the history of victim rights in America, documenting the wide array of participatory rights, the uneven implementation of these rights, and the difficulty of enforcing victim rights across the country.

Muscat and Walsh's chapter focuses on underserved populations of crime victims in the United States. Such victims consist of the homeless, ethnic and sexual minorities, persons with disabilities, and individuals who live in remote rural areas. For each category, the authors review the prevalence of victimization, the special needs of underserved victims, and barriers that they face when seeking resources. They also point to the pressing demand for additional, and more sensitive, services to meet the needs of underserved victims of crime.

This volume is designed to appeal to scholars, criminal justice practitioners, and government officials alike. For that matter, we hope it is of interest to anyone who wants to understand what we know about the experience of victims of crime. Our hope is that this compilation of research will not only inform the evolving field of victim assistance, but also serve as a catalyst for greater understanding of the needs and concerns of victims of crime throughout our criminal justice and social service systems.

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