

Effects of Victimization

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Abstract

Crime affects everyone differently. Victimization often causes trauma and depending upon the level of trauma that a person has already experienced in their lifetime, crime can be devastating. In general, victimization often impacts people on an emotional, physical, financial, psychological, and social level. Although the financial impact of crime is less documented than the physical, emotion or social impacts, victims may certainly incur costs in the many ways. Secondary victimization refers to the victimization which occurs, not as a direct result of the criminal act, but through the response of institutions and individuals to the victim.

KEYWORDS: Victims – VICTIMIZATION – EFFECT-

INTRODUCTION

Criminal victimization is a terrifying and unsettling experience in our country. It is unpredictable, largely unpreventable and often unexpected. Unlike normal life experiences, victimization is not sought out and never welcomed. It is devastating and demoralizing. Its effects can be often long-term and difficult to overcome. Victims may be confused, fearful, frustrated and angry. They want to know why this happened, and why it happened to them. Victims often have no knowledge of whom or where to turn in the aftermath of crime. They feel insecure and do not know whom to trust or rely on for support, understanding, and help. Not only do they suffer physically, emotionally, psychologically and financially from their victimization, they are also often burdened by the complexity of the criminal justice system.

DEFINITION OF A VICTIM

In criminology and criminal law, a victim of a crime is an identifiable person who has been harmed individually and directly by the perpetrator, rather than merely the society as a whole. However, this may not always be the case, as with victims of white collar crime, who may not be clearly identifiable or directly linked to the crime. Victims of white collar crime are often denied their status as victims by the social construction of the concept.

MEANING OF VICTIMIZATION

Victimization is the process of being victimized. According to dictionary, to victimize is to (1) make someone a victim or sacrifice (2) punish someone unjustly, or (3) swindle or defraud someone.

Victimization occurs when a person suffers direct or threatened physical, emotional, and/or financial harm. Victimization can include physical violence, sexual violence, psychological or emotional abuse, and neglect.

Victimization can occur anywhere; however, it usually happens in isolated locations where a person with disabilities has little or no control of the environment and the setting is away from the view of law enforcement.

THE EMOTIONAL EFFECTS OF VICTIMIZATION

Shock, disbelief and denial – Initially, victims may find it difficult to believe they have become a victim of crime. They may even pretend that it did not happen at all. These reactions can last for a few moments or they may be present for months and even years. It is not uncommon for victims to assume a ‘childlike’ state and may even need to be cared for by others for some time. It is also common for victims to feel as though the crime occurred when they were in a dreamlike state.

Once the initial shock of the crime has worn off, victims may experience other emotions such as anger, fear, frustration, confusion, guilt, shame, and grief.

Anger or rage – Victims may be angry with God, the offender, service providers, family members, friends, the criminal justice system, or even themselves. Many victims experience strong desires for revenge or getting even. Hate may even felt by victims. These strong emotions are often disapproved of by the rest of society, which can leave the victim feeling like an outcast. It is certainly justified for victims to feel anger toward the person or people who harmed them.

Fear or Terror – It is common for victims to feel terror or fear following a crime that involved a threat to one’s safety or life, or to someone else a victim cares about. Fear can cause a person to have panic attacks if they are ever reminded of the crime. Fear can last for quite some time following the commission of a crime and under certain circumstances, it can become debilitating. Fear or terror that becomes overwhelming is unhealthy and victims should consult their family physician about it as soon as possible.

Frustration – Many victims are frustrated by the feelings of helplessness or powerlessness that surface when the crime takes place. This can be especially true if victims were unable to fend off an offender, call for help or run away. After the crime, victims may continue to feel frustration if they cannot access the support and information that is necessary to their healing.

Guilt or self-blame – Blaming oneself is common. Many victims believe they were “in the wrong place at the wrong time.” If the victim does not have someone to blame, they will often blame themselves. Guilt is also common when no offender is found. Later on, when reflecting upon the crime, victims might feel guilty for not doing more to prevent what happened. Lastly, some victims will experience ‘survivor guilt’ – they feel guilty that they survived while someone else was injured or even killed. If a loved one is murdered, surviving family and friends may even blame the victim. Too often, society blames victims as well.

Shame and humiliation – Sadly, some victims blame themselves, particularly victims of sexual abuse/assault or domestic violence. In crimes involving sexual acts, offenders often degrade the victim by making them do humiliating things. Victims of rape, for

example, have long-lasting feelings of “being dirty”, and those feelings cannot be “washed away.” Some victims even feel self-hatred because they believe that they can no longer be loved by those who are close to them.

THE PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF VICTIMIZATION

At the time of the crime, or upon discovering that a crime has occurred, victims are likely to experience a number of physical reactions. These may include an increase in the adrenalin in the body, increased heart rate, hyperventilation, shaking, tears, numbness, a feeling of being frozen or experiencing events in slow motion, dryness of the mouth, enhancement of particular senses such as smell, and a “fight or flight” response. It is also common for people to lose control over their bowel movements. Some of these physical reactions may occur immediately and others may occur after the danger has passed. Physical reactions to crime can be so powerful that they reoccur quite some time after the crime, for example with the victim’s memory of the events.

Physical injuries that result from crime may be classified as: minor (bumps, scratches), moderate (bruises, broken bones), and severe (stabbing, gunshot wounds). Some physical injuries will be visible, while others will not. It may not be possible to see all physical injuries such as internal organ injuries or a brain injury, or those internal injuries caused by a sexual assault. Also, physical injuries arising from victimization may not always be immediately apparent. This may be particularly true in cases of domestic violence where the injuries occur on parts of the body that are normally clothed. It is important not to assume that a victim is uninjured simply because there are no visible signs. After the crime, victims may suffer a range of physical effects including insomnia, appetite disturbance, lethargy, headaches, muscle tension, nausea, and decreased libido. It is common for these reactions to persist for some time after the crime has occurred. Some victims may experience long-term side effects as a result of the crime committed against them. Other victims may experience ongoing health-related problems such as headaches, stomachaches, and emotional outbursts. Even after the physical wounds have healed, some victims may experience pain or discomfort for a period of time or even for the rest of their lives.

Victims who have suffered physical injuries as a result of an assault or the negligence of another person may experience strong feelings of fear, anger and bitterness. This sort of victimization is a life altering experience that may leave victims questioning their personal safety for many years to come.

THE FINANCIAL EFFECTS OF VICTIMIZATION

Victims who may have money stolen, or possessions stolen or damaged have been financially injured. In many cases, stolen money and prized possessions are never recovered. Understandably, this is very distressing to victims who may feel guilt, anger, and frustration if they are unable to recover a family heirloom.

Although the financial impact of crime is less documented than the physical, emotion or social impacts, victims may certainly incur costs in the following ways:

- Repairing property or replacing possessions.
- Higher insurance premiums as a result of victimization.

- Installing security measures.
- Accessing health services.
- Medical expenses.
- Participating in the criminal justice system, for example traveling to court, child care and attending the trial.
- Taking time off work or from other income generating activities.
- Funeral or burial expenses.

In the long-term, crime can adversely impact the victim's employment. The victim may find it impossible to return to work, or their work performance may be adversely affected, resulting in demotion, loss of pay, and possibly dismissal. This is particularly likely where the crime occurred at work, as it may be difficult for the victim to avoid people or situations which led to the initial victimization.

It was held by the Supreme Court in the case of Bhartiya Seva Samaj Trust Tr.Pres.anr vs. Yogeshbhai Ambalal Patel and Anr¹ that after going through the records it is evident that the appellant has acted with malice along with respondent and it was not merely a case of discrimination rather it is clear case of victimization of respondent 1by the School Management for raising his voice against exploitation.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF VICTIMIZATION

It is almost impossible to predict how an individual will respond to crime. Psychological injuries created by crime are often the most difficult to cope with and have long-lasting effects. As crime is usually experienced as more serious than an accident or misfortune, it is difficult to come to terms with the fact that loss and injury have been caused by the deliberate act of another human being.

Common reactions to crime can be split into four stages:

1. The initial reaction may include shock, fear, anger, helplessness, disbelief and guilt. As mentioned previously, some of these reactions may reoccur at a later stage as well, for example when attending a trial or going to hospital for medical treatment.
2. A period of disorganization may follow these initial reactions. This phase may manifest itself in psychological effects such as distressing thoughts about the event, nightmares, depression, guilt, fear, and a loss of confidence and esteem. Life can seem to slow down and become meaningless. Previously held beliefs and faiths may no longer provide comfort. Behavioral responses might include increased alcohol or substance abuse, fragmentation of social relationships, avoidance of people and situations associated with the crime, and social withdrawal.
3. The third stage is reconstruction and acceptance, which leads to the fourth stage of normalization/adjustment. Victims often try to come to terms with crime by longing for everything to be as it was before and to turn the clock back.

¹ AIR (SC)3285, 2012

4. In this crucial stage of recovery victims begin to fully accept the reality of what has happened. Victims may try to reinterpret their experience and possibly find an explanation for what has happened or to decide that the crime has led to personal growth.

THE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF VICTIMIZATION

Crime victimization can also cause disruptions in social activities and impaired functioning in social relationships. Multiple studies have found that sexual assault victims experience subsequent impairments in their social and leisure activities. Although there is general agreement that sexual victimization impacts social functioning, the length of disruption has been inconsistent across studies. For example, Resick and colleagues (1981)² reported that social and leisure adjustment were significantly worse for rape victims than for controls 2 months after the assault, but subsequently improved so that no differences were observed by 4 months post assault. In contrast, Nadelson, Notman, Zackson, and Gornick (1982)³ found that over half of the rape victims in their study continued to report a restricted social life 15 to 30 months after their assault.

Social functioning within the context of partner violence is unique in that batterers seek to maintain dominance and control by keeping the victim dependent and isolated from others. Therefore, social isolation is a common phenomenon among women living in abusive situations. Studies generally find that women in violent relationships have an inadequate number of supporters and are often reluctant to ask these supporters for help.

In 1993, the Supreme Court, in a writ petition, Delhi Domestic Working Women's Forum vs Union of India and Others⁴, (which is also an example of domestic servants subjected to indecent sexual assault and its Social effects on the Victim) had directed the National Commission for Women (NCW) to evolve a 'scheme so as to wipe out the tears of unfortunate victims of rape' . Thereupon, the Union of India, will examine the same and shall necessary steps for the implementation of the scheme at the earliest

CONCLUSION

The above study reveals that becoming a victim of crime is an unpleasant and unwanted life experience at best. The impact of criminal victimization is serious, throwing victims into a state of shock, fear anxiety and anger. The emotional, physical, psychological and financial ramifications of crime can be devastating to victims. Coping with and recovering from victimization are complex processes. Sadly, some victims may never be able to do so.

²"Social adjustment in victims of sexual assault." - Resick PA, Calhoun KS, Atkeson BM, Ellis EM J Consult Clin Psychol. 1981 Oct

³ "A follow-up study of rape victims". - Nadelson CC, Notman MT, Zackson H, Gornick J Am J Psychiatry. 1982 Oct.

⁴1995 SCC (1) 14, JT 1994 (7) 183

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