

Victims and the Police:

A Victim's Journey Through the Criminal Justice System



Integrate Crime Victims' Issues Into University and College Curricula

The project is designed to:

- Broaden college and university students' awareness of crime victims' issues and knowledge of appropriate responses.
- Increase the number and diversity of students exposed to and educated in crime victims' issues.
- Give victim issues a new level of prominence in university and college curricula.

Resources for Students

Campus resources to list typically include:

- Counseling.
- Health services.
- College chaplain/Faith community.
- Dean of students.
- Women's centers.
- Campus police.

Resources for Students

Local community resources to list typically include:

- Rape crisis center.
- Domestic violence shelter agency.
- Local or county victim-witness office (often a part of the prosecutor's office).

National Resource Information

National Resource Information

Student Handout

Lecture Overview

Introduction

Police Reported Crime

- Types and rates of reported crime
- Reasons for unreported crime

Reporting Process

Potential Outcomes of Reported Crime

Conclusions

Crime Reported to Police

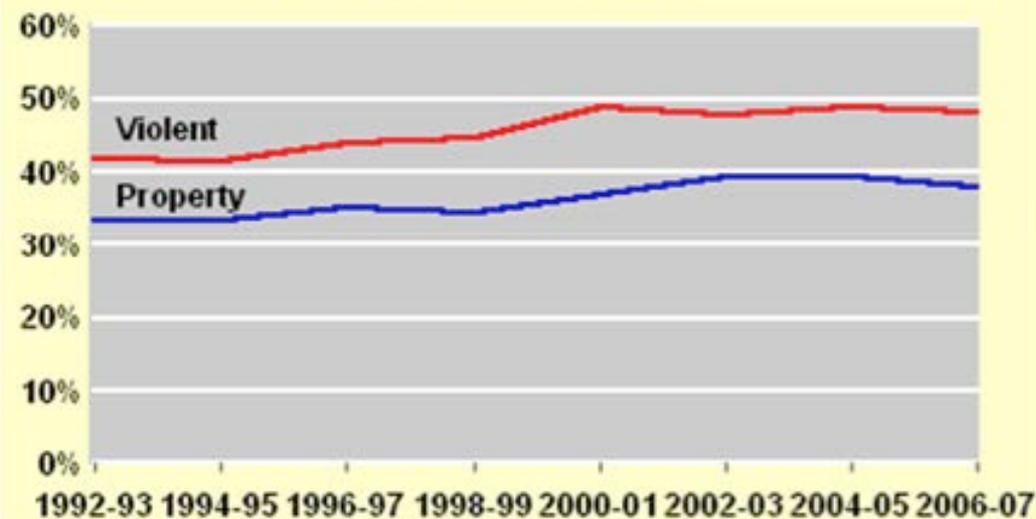
Approximately

Less than half of all crime is reported to the police

In 2007, **47% of violent crime** and **40% of property crimes** were reported to the police

Data Source for slide:
Rand, M. & Truman, J.,
2009. National Crime
Victimization Survey.
Bureau of Justice
Statistics, Washington
D.C.

Percent of total crime reported to police



Purpose of Reporting Crime

- To identify crime patterns and trends within a city or town.
- To create an accurate picture of crime for the police and citizens.
- To enable police departments to allocate resources appropriately.

Crime Reported to Police

Victims of property crimes are less likely to report than victims of violence.

Crime victims who are injured are more likely to report a violent crime to the police than those that are not injured.

Crime Reported to Police

- Rape and sexual assault are less likely to be reported than other personal (violent) crimes.
- Rape/sexual assault victims may fear reprisal, not want to tell their families, or worry that police won't believe them or treat them with hostility.
- Stalking victims report similar fears.
- Shame and self-blame can be other reasons why victimization may not be reported.

Crime Reported to Police

- Motor vehicle theft has highest reporting levels.
- Motor vehicle theft reporting rates are likely high because insurance companies require a police report in order to compensate subscribers for stolen vehicle.

Why Crimes are not Reported

Most common reasons provided by victims:

- It was a “personal/private matter” (20%).
- The violence was considered “not important enough” (17%).
- It was “reported to some other official” (14%).

National Crime Victimization Survey, 2009

Why Crimes are not Reported

- Self-blame.
- The belief that police can't help.
- Someone else already reported the crime.

Discussion

- What could be done to increase/improve reporting rates?
- What steps would you take to convince victims who feel their crime is not “important enough” to report?
- Could technology help with reporting (e.g., filing reports online)?

Police-Initiated Action

It is unlikely for police to come upon the scene of a crime, so police-initiated action is low.

Police initiated action:

- Occurs in only 6% of crime incidents (5% violent, 1% property).

Citizen reporting (generally victims or witnesses):

- Approach an officer.
- File a report online.
- Call 911.

Call 911 when...

- The situation requires an officer on scene (e.g., assaults, kidnapping, burglaries, domestic disputes).
- A crime is in progress.
- Auspicious or potential criminal activity is in progress (e.g., alarms, shots fired, shout for help, sounds of glass breaking).

911 Decisionmakers

Operator:

- Answers incoming call from the public.
- Retrieves relevant information.
- Determines if police response is necessary.
 - ◆ If yes, the information is passed on to the dispatcher.

Decisionmakers

The operator gathers:

- Caller's address.
- What the caller is reporting.
- Who is involved in the incident.

Decisionmakers

Dispatcher:

- Assigns available officer(s) to incident or stacks the call using computer aided dispatch.
- Decides how many officers to send to the call as well as the urgency of the call.

Role of Responding Officer

Patrol officers are primary responders.

Crime scene tasks may include:

- Attending to victims.
- Securing the crime scene for evidence collection.
- Determining the need for and calling emergency medical service.
- Advising other public safety personnel upon their arrival.

Role of Responding Officer

Patrol officers are primary responders.

Crime scene tasks may include:

- Obtaining information about the incident.
- Collecting evidence.
- Interviewing witnesses at the scene.
- Arresting the offender on the scene.

Role of Responding Officer

Responding officer should:

- Introduce himself or herself to the victim.
- Assure the victim of his/her safety.
- Explain the next steps to the victim.
- Inform the victims of their rights.
- Make sure that the victim is safe from re-victimization.
- Take into account age, physical disabilities, or illnesses of the victim.

Interacting With the Victim

How police respond can impact victims' psychological health and their future relationship with the criminal justice system:

- Victims who perceive the police are taking their case seriously are more likely to report future crimes.
- Police should avoid engaging in victim-blaming.

Victim-Blaming

- Blaming the victim is unproductive.
- It may have a negative impact on the victim.
- Talking about prevention is not the same as victim-blaming.
- Leave the blame where it belongs – with the person who chose to commit a crime.

Victim-Blaming

- Victim-blaming is often subtle, unintentional, and without malicious intent.
- However, there are certain ways that police officers may ask questions that can lessen any sense of victim-blaming.

Victim Participation is Critical

Victims should be treated as co-producers of public safety.

Victims participate in:

- The immediate response to the crime.
- The ongoing investigation of the incident.
- Efforts to prevent a reoccurrence.

Being a Victim...

- May impact a victim's ability to talk about an incident and recall/share the information.
- Trauma can impede the ability to properly remember events.
- Victims may be confused and give contradictory responses; this should not be read as lying.
- Trauma impacts the processing of memory formation and recall.

Communication Challenge

Victims may:

- Be traumatized by the event.
- Be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs.
- Be injured as a result of the crime.
- Have language or cultural barrier.

Unfounded Crime Defined

- In an unfounded crime, police determine a complaint to be false or baseless; no offense was completed or attempted.
- Decision left to the discretion of the responding officer.
- Less serious crimes are most likely to be deemed unfounded.

Explanations for Unfounded Crime

- Citizens may not understand the criminal law and report events that are not crimes.
- There may be insufficient evidence that a crime was committed.
- Officers may misuse their discretion when unbounding crimes.
- Unbounding crime can be a way for police to make their community appear safer than it is.

Unfounded Crime Outcomes

- No crime committed: Citizens may need a referral to a different municipal agency.
- Insufficient evidence: What a citizen perceives as an attempted break-in may instead be the wind banging a loose door.
- Misuse of discretion: Police may unfound a crime if they are biased against the victim.
- Appearance of safety: Problem that often results when the police department is under pressure from political leaders to reduce the crime rate.

Potential Outcomes for the Offender

No arrest at scene:

- The case will be referred to a detective for further investigation.
- The assigned detective should contact the victim as the investigation progresses.

Arrest at scene:

- The offender will make initial court appearance – usually within 24 hours.
- Criminal justice process moves out of the hands of the police and into those of the prosecutor and courts.

Potential Outcomes for Domestic Violence

- Mandatory policy is police must arrest, provided legal criteria for arrest are satisfied.
- Pro-Arrest policy is arrest as the preferred response.
- In a dual-arrest, victims are arrested together with the offenders.
- Victim advocates may be available to help.

Conclusions

- Crime victims have the power to initiate the criminal justice process.
- Police are responsible for helping crime victims regardless of whether or not an arrest is made.
- The victim and the police are co-producers of public safety: Establishing trust and partnership is paramount.