

## **Reading**

### **The Impact of Criminal Victimization**

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Being the target or victim of a crime may have both immediate and long-term consequences for the victims, their friends, families, and relatives. For the victim these consequences may include the pain and suffering inflicted by the criminal act, the need for medical and mental health care, lost wages from not being able to go to work, and a reduced quality of life from debilitating injuries, trauma, and/or fear of being victimized again.

It should be noted that a crime's impact on the victim may vary and that one should not expect that all victims will react in the same way or show the effects immediately. Victimization may impact people on a physical, psychological, emotional, and financial level. It is difficult to predict how an individual will respond to crime, but its impact may be compounded in ways that make its consequences greater than the effects of similar, accidental, harm. Those with a prior history of mental health problems may be at increased risk of more serious psychological and emotional consequences.

Impact may vary for different types of offenses and also from one victim to the next. The impact immediately following the crime and the long-term impact may also be different. So, for example, the impact of victimization at one stage of life may have a different impact on that same individual many years later. Or symptoms may tend to recur at different developmental stages. Many victims have no symptoms or are "asymptomatic." But those who are asymptomatic may later become symptomatic.

Generally those who have studied crime victimization impacts have found that there is no one dominant and consistent set of symptoms. Criminal victimization is more complicated because it produces multifaceted effects. Some of the factors that may affect the impact include characteristics and context of the offense (the violence, the relationship of the victim to the perpetrator, the length, location and other circumstances surrounding the crime), intelligence, coping skills, prior adjustment, the victim's past experiences, age, physical and mental health and the victims' understanding of the crime. In addition, family and social environment, and support systems, as well as the actions taken by professionals (including criminal justice system personnel) in response to the crime may intervene and influence the impact.

If time has elapsed since the crime occurred then the symptoms may abate. On the other hand, the passage of time may be associated with a reoccurrence of symptoms or

appearance of new symptoms, especially if the individual has experienced a new victimization.

Crime not only affects its immediate victims, but also impacts secondary victims and society as a whole. The “indirect” or “secondary” victims (such as the victim’s family members, friends or even those who provide services to victims) may also experience immediate and long term consequences. In addition, the effects of victimization are felt by society as a whole. Society incurs costs from the involvement of the criminal justice system, health care services, and other social service agencies, as well as workforce costs (such as decreased productivity by those directly victimized).

## **The Impact on Victims**

### **1. Physical and Financial Consequences**

a) **Death**: In 2008, more than 14,000 people were victims of homicide (Rand, September 2009). Among 10 to 24 year-olds, homicide is the leading cause of death for African Americans; the second leading cause of death for Hispanics and Asian/Pacific Islanders; and the third leading cause of death for American Indians and Alaska Natives (Miniño, et al. 2011). Homicide rates among non-Hispanic, African-American males 10-24 years of age (58.3 per 100,000) exceed those of Hispanic males (20.9 per 100,000) and non-Hispanic, White males in the same age group (3.3 per 100,000) (CDC, 2008).

b) **Injury**: According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2007 approximately 36 percent of robbery and 23 percent of assault victims were physically injured. Their consequences can be short term or long term. A minority of victims will suffer injuries that can disable them or negatively impact them for life. Some victims are physically disabled as a result of serious wounds sustained during episodes of random violence, including a growing number that suffer paralyzing spinal cord injuries (Heaton, 2009).

c) **Illness**: There are a myriad of illnesses victims can suffer, including high blood pressure, and other stress-related illnesses. Sexually transmitted diseases (STD’s) are obviously a potential outcome of a sexual assault, and while not an illness, pregnancy may result as well. Psychosomatic illness may be indirectly linked to victimizations. In these cases, people really are ill – what distinguishes psychosomatic illness is that there is not an external cause or identifiable pathogen – rather psychological stress is leading to real illness (Anderson, Grandison, Dyson, 1996).

d) **Healthcare costs**: Those victims whose symptoms require medical and/or psychological treatment, may incur many costs. In addition, a secondary victim of a crime (for example, a person who is present at the scene of a crime and/or experiences harm indirectly such as an intimate partner or family member) may have costs. Many lack the insurance needed to cover those costs. They may also encounter other prohibitions placed on them by an abusive partner or family member (Heaton, 2009). Estimates are that violent crime also accounts for 10 percent to 20 percent of mental health care costs annually. The health-related costs of rape, physical assault, stalking and

homicide committed by intimate partners exceed \$5.8 billion each year (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003).

e) **Lost wages:** Victims may have to miss work to recover from physical injuries, deal with and recover from mental health problems, or because they must be present for criminal justice system appointments, hearings and proceedings. This lost work time adds up to financial loss for the victim and for the place of employment. Even when victims are present at work, their productivity may suffer. For example, The Workplace Violence Institute estimates that 96 percent of battered women experience problems at work due to the abuse. Fifty-six percent of female domestic violence victims are late to work more often than those who are not abused and 28 percent of victims tend to leave work early.

f) **Other Financial Costs:** Victims may suffer both immediate and long-term financial losses. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2007, approximately 18 percent of victims of personal crimes, and 94 percent of victims of property crime incurred costs as the result of a criminal act. For example, on average, a robbery costs \$750 in stolen or damaged property. The victim's long term economic and professional successes may be impacted by the psychological and physical consequences of victimization which may inhibit academic achievement for those still in school, or productivity for those working (Cook, Smith & Harrel, 1987).

A victim's financial costs may be for other types of expenses as well. For example, financial costs can include attorney fees, child care costs, moving expenses, changing phone numbers, and the loss or need to change employment.

## **2. Psychological and Mental Health Impacts**

The emotional and mental health of victims has been identified as a key component of a victim's negative post-crime experiences (Cook, Smith, & Harrel, 1987). Victims of crime are more likely to rate their overall mental health at lower levels than non-victims.

There is a growing understanding that criminal victimization can be an extremely traumatic event, leaving many victims with significant levels of psychological emotional stress (Macmillan, 2000). In addition, victims may suffer stress long after the incident is over and the criminal justice process has been completed. As can be expected, this may then cause additional problems in a person's life, such as with work, family, and friends.

We know that for victims of crime, all these consequences pose significant risk to their mental health, with victims of violent crime typically experiencing higher levels of emotional stress than victims of non-violent crime (Atkeson, et al., 1982; Green & Pomeroy, 2005; Kilpatrick et al., 1985; Roberts & Green, 2007; Norris & Kaniasty, 1991).

We also know that there is considerable variability in the extent of and ways in which victims experience emotional stress. The psychological impact may not be in direct proportion to the amount of violence perpetrated in the incident, such as the amount of force used or physical injuries sustained. Instead, the impact may be affected by a variety of factors including the nature and type of crime experienced, the reaction of others, the

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support networks available, and the personal characteristics and coping strategies of victims. For example, the degree of violence a victim experiences, the degree to which victimization was unexpected and random, and a victim's anger may place them at greater risk for negative emotional and psychological impacts. Shock, disbelief, numbness, changes in appetite or sleeping patterns, difficulty concentrating, confusion, anger, fear, and anxiety are all symptoms an individual can experience as the result of victimization.

Research indicates that demographic characteristics such as the gender, race, or age of the victim do not determine the level of emotional stress resulting from a criminal event (although there is some evidence that women are more likely to develop PTSD than men). Importantly, the experiences individuals have had before they are victimized may influence how the crime impacts them. Prior victimization has been consistently shown to contribute to an increase in the level of trauma experienced following a new crime.

Victims, even those who initially show few or even no consequences, may suffer stress and anxiety long after the incident is over and the criminal justice process has been completed. The danger evidenced by a victimization experience can naturally create fear. Such fear may result in immediate changes as the body prepares itself (such as a spike in adrenaline). This is a healthy reaction meant to protect a person from harm. However, victimization and the resultant stresses also can be problematic and may trigger unhealthy reactions. Below is some discussion of the most common psychological and mental health impacts that victims may experience.

***a) Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):***

According to the DSM-V Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the development of characteristic symptoms following exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity, or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person. The characteristic symptoms resulting from the exposure to the extreme trauma include persistent re-experiencing of the traumatic event, persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness, and persistent symptoms of increased arousal. People who have PTSD may feel stressed or frightened even when they are no longer in danger. They also may experience a persistent re-experiencing of the event. Many victims have some symptoms of PTSD and others suffer from full blown (what would be included in an official diagnosis of) PTSD. In fact, not only do high proportions of victims of crimes suffer from PTSD, but a high proportion of the individuals diagnosed with PTSD are crime victims. For crime victims, PTSD is often exacerbated when they do not receive adequate support from family and friends (Scarpa, Haden & Hurley, 2006) and do not receive needed services.

For additional information on PTSD, see:

[www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml)

***b) Depression and Anxiety:***

Victims also may be diagnosed with depression and anxiety, including fear of crime and phobias, both of which often co-occur with PTSD. Some victims may become so depressed that they become suicidal.

Anxiety often manifests itself through fear of crime, which is one measure that may stay elevated for victims in the long term. Fear can also cause victims to make major lifestyle changes which can include residential relocation, or stopping or avoiding work or seeking new employment, all of which can result in monetary costs to the victim.

***c) Cognitive Difficulties***

Victimization experiences can lead to a number of negative impacts in the cognitive realm. This may include self-blame, negative attributions or rationalizations and resultant low self-esteem.

***d) Behavioral Effects***

Victimization may impact the way individuals live their lives, both through conscious decisions (such as undertaking preventive measures) and unconscious acts (like low work productivity). Some examples of behavioral changes that can result from victimization are: low work productivity, disturbances in relationships, avoidance behavior, substance abuse and anti-social behavior. It is important to note that while most crime victims do not go on to become offenders there is evidence that crime victims themselves – especially child victims of crime – are more likely than non-victims to commit crimes. In addition, they may take drastic measures, fearing re-victimization, and arm themselves for self- protection (Melde, Esbensen & Taylor: 2009). Such measures may amplify re-victimization risk.

**Revictimization**

The suffering endured by crime victims does not end when the offender leaves the scene of the crime. They may be revictimized as the result of how others respond to their experience. Victims may endure innuendos or insinuations from friends, family and police officers who suggest or imply that they are to blame for what happened or that the crime was somehow their fault.

The refusal to recognize a victim's experience as criminal victimization and blame placed on them for what others perceive as risky or inappropriate behavior that resulted in the crime are especially painful for victims. Victims of date and acquaintance rape, for example, may be made to feel they were somehow responsible for the attack because they used poor judgment or took risks (Melde, Esbensen, Taylor, 2009). Rape survivors are often the target of negative reactions from those from whom they expected to get support.

The criminal justice system is designed to process offenders and is not designed to address victim needs. Victims often find the process and procedures confusing, and that their preferences and perspective are not considered. In addition, with the case backlogs

that typify almost all courts, victims may find that little time is given to their case, and that their needs are not addressed.

These experiences all influence a victim's future willingness to report a crime.

### **What is the Impact of Crime on Society?**

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2007 crime, as well as the recovery process, resulted in **a total economic loss of more than \$17 billion dollars** (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007). These costs do not only impact victims, but society as a whole. It has been estimated that victims bear 77 percent of the tangible costs associated with violent crimes, while taxpayers cover an additional 14 percent and employers cover the remainder (Kilpatrick, Edmunds, and Seymour, 1992). These losses include costs for medical care, time lost from work, property loss and damage, costs to repair or replace property, and time spent dealing with the criminal justice system. These figures do not include all the possible costs incurred by the victim because many costs were not included in these estimates or are costs that were incurred after the survey was completed (Acierno, et al, 2004).

#### Societal Costs

a. Health care costs. Violent crime accounts for 3 percent of U.S. medical spending and 14 percent of U.S. injury related medical spending (Miller, Cohen, & Wiersma, 1996). As an example, on average a rape costs \$500 in medical expenses and \$2200 in mental health expenses.

b. Lost work and wages. Lost work time adds up to financial loss for a victim's employer as well as for the victim.

c. Criminal justice system costs. Part of the economic loss due to victimization is the cost to American taxpayers of maintaining the justice system.

- In 2006, the United States (at federal, state, and local levels) spent \$214 billion for police protection, corrections, and judicial and legal activities.

(Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007)

- In addition, victim compensation programs distributed \$461 million in 2008.

(National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards, "Crime Victim Compensation Helps Victims," Alexandria, VA: NACVCB, 2009),

d. Juvenile justice system costs. Juveniles are a sizable proportion of both crime victims and offenders. Violent crime by juveniles alone costs the United States \$158 billion each year (Children's Safety Network Economics and Insurance Resource Center, 2000). This estimate includes some of the costs incurred by federal, state, and local governments to assist victims of juvenile violence, such as medical treatment for injuries and services for victims, which amount to about \$30 billion. The remaining \$128 billion is due to losses

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suffered by victims, such as lost wages, pain, suffering, and reduced quality of life. Not included in these figures are the costs incurred trying to reduce juvenile violence, which include early prevention programs, services for juveniles, and the juvenile justice system.

Juvenile violence is only one of the costs to society. If the cost of the justice system, legal costs, treatment costs, and so on, are included, the total loss due to crime amounts to \$450 billion annually, or about \$1,800 per U.S. citizen (Miller, Cohen, & Wiersma, 1996)

The National Center for Victims of Crime Report reported that the direct costs of maltreatment in the United States totals more than \$33 billion annually. When including indirect costs, the estimate is over \$103 billion annually (Miller, Cohen, & Wiersma, 1996).

### **Impact on Communities**

In addition, costs often are not only monetary but include general fear of crime for those close to the victim, those in their neighborhoods or within society in general. Thus, it is not only victims who may relocate following the crime, but people in the same neighborhood as a victim are more likely to move. Their fears may be escalated by graphic news accounts of crime and violence especially because such media coverage tends to focus on the most egregious offenses (Smolej & Kivivuori, 2006). Such fear reactions may also erode neighborhoods and community cohesiveness and thus contribute to increases in crime.

Relocation is actually more likely to occur in response to property crime than violent crime because violent crime is often between intimates, family members or acquaintances and relocation may not be seen as a viable option that will lower risk. Such victimization, however, may force victims to relocate and they may become homeless, thus increasing the need for society to provide services.

### **Resources**

**1. You can find considerable information in the 2007 National Victim Assistance Academy Module 6.** They provide case scenarios, as well as worksheets with a detailed list of possible physical, psychological/emotional, financial, and spiritual impacts on victims for a diverse range of offenses.

[www.ccvs.state.vt.us/sites/default/files/resources/VVAA%20Ch%206%20Impact%20of%20Crime.pdf](http://www.ccvs.state.vt.us/sites/default/files/resources/VVAA%20Ch%206%20Impact%20of%20Crime.pdf)

**2. Visit the National Center for Victims of Crime to update latest figures on impact of criminal victimization.**

[www.ncvc.org/ncvc/Main.aspx](http://www.ncvc.org/ncvc/Main.aspx)

[www.ovcttac.gov/victimimpact/presenters\\_toolbox.cfm](http://www.ovcttac.gov/victimimpact/presenters_toolbox.cfm)

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Alternatively, The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports findings from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). This can be used to provide current crime data and demonstrate its impact on the population, as well as variations based on gender, race, ethnicity, and age.

See: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=9>

**3. See *Children's Exposure to Violence: A Comprehensive National Survey (October, 2009)* by David Finkelhor, Heather Turner, Richard Ormrod, Sherry Hamby, and Kristen Kracke.**

This Survey measured past year and lifetime exposure to violence for children age 17 and younger across several major categories: conventional crime, child maltreatment, victimization by peers and siblings, sexual victimization, witnessing and indirect victimization (including exposure to community violence and family violence), school violence and threats, and Internet victimization.

[www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/227744.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/227744.pdf)

**4. For current data on the impact of stalking, see:**

Botuck, S., Berretty, P., Cho, S., Tax, C.A., Archer, M., Cattaneou, L.B. (June, 2009). [Understanding Intimate Partner Stalking: Implications for Offering Victim Services.](http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/227220.pdf) Document No.: 227220 .Award Number: 2005-WG-BX-0007  
<http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/227220.pdf>

**5. For more information on PTSD, you can see:**

[www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/what-are-the-symptoms-of-ptsd.shtml](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/what-are-the-symptoms-of-ptsd.shtml)

[www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml)

**6. For more information on the costs of crime, see:**

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