Who is a Victim of Crime?

This curriculum kit was created as a part of the National-Scope Demonstration Project to Integrate Crime Victims’ Issues into University and College Curricula. The project is funded by a grant from the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC, a component of the Office of Justice Programs within the U.S. Department of Justice) to achieve the project goals of increasing the numbers of students exposed to information about crime victims and interested in working with crime victims, and thereby improve the future provision of services to crime victims.

Learning Objectives

After completing this curriculum kit, students should be able to:

- Describe who may be considered a victim of crime and the types of harm they may experience.
- Distinguish between primary and secondary victims of crime.

Time Required

Completion of the curriculum kit materials and assignments will require 20-40 minutes of class time. The curriculum kit may be expanded to include additional readings and discussion.

Required Materials

- Equipment needed to use PowerPoint as an instructional tool.

Suggested Courses

This curriculum kit can be modified for use in courses of different disciplines, including but not limited to criminal justice, psychology, sociology, nursing, social work, business and history.
Directory of Materials

1. Faculty Materials
   a. *Who is a Victim of Crime?* Faculty Guide, includes Discussion Questions
   b. *Who is a Victim of Crime?* PowerPoint presentation

2. Student Materials
   a. Student Reading, “Who is a Victim of Crime?”
   b. National Resources for Crime Victims Handout

**Introduction and a Note to Faculty**

This kit provides a definition of the key concept of crime victim. It is critical that students understand who may be a victim of crime and that it is not only the direct victims of crime who experience the consequences of victimization. In addition, it is important that students are able to distinguish between primary and secondary victims of crime.

This Faculty Guide includes guidance on implementing the curriculum kit, including recommended talking points for the PowerPoint presentation and related in-class discussion and assignments. The larger curriculum kit includes supplementary materials to provide faculty with additional background knowledge, if desired, and guidance on teaching about victimization.

Please review all materials thoroughly prior to use.
Post-Secondary Education:
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PowerPoint Presentation/Class Lecture

Slide 1.
Introduce the curriculum kit.

Slide 2.
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.

Note to Faculty:
Faculty should be aware of the appropriate professional resources for students who are victims of crime. In preparation for this lecture, faculty may find it helpful to develop a short list of campus and local community resources that can be used to refer students to, as well as including some national resources.

Modify the resources on the next two slides and provide appropriate contact information for your campus. It is helpful to have these resources available to share with students who come to the office, as well as available for students to access without talking to faculty, such as including them in the syllabus and online via course and faculty Web pages. National resources are included on the National Resources for Crime Victims. Have enough copies to hand out to each student.

Student Resources

Slide 3.
Campus resources to list typically include:

- Counseling.
- Health services
- College chaplain/faith community.
- Dean of students.
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- Women’s center.
- Campus police.

Slide 4.

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).

Slide 5.

National Resources Information

A list of national resources for victims of crime appears at the end of this curriculum kit. Faculty should provide each student with this list; it is included in the Student Materials of this curriculum kit.

Slide 6.

Suggested Talking Points:

In a traditional narrow legal sense, a crime victim is generally defined as a person who has experienced physical, sexual or financial harm as a result of the commission of a criminal offense.

For the most part, suffering emotional or psychological harm alone does not legally define one as a crime victim. For example, no crime has been committed against someone who is the victim of emotional abuse alone. Putting someone down is not a criminal offense.

However, threatening to harm someone may be a crime and in an offense of attempted murder, such as when the offender threatens the victim with a gun but does not fire, the victim may not experience any physical harm. In addition, it should be noted that most crime victims do experience emotional harm along with physical, sexual, or financial harm. Once harm has been inflicted, the person is a victim, even if the harm has not been reported to the police or any other authorities nor disclosed to family or friends.

Victim services generally may still be provided without such disclosures. For this curriculum, the term “crime victim” has been broadened to include a person, group, business, or organization that has been harmed or injured due to criminal activity. The harm inflicted may be physical, financial, mental, or religious/spiritual.
1. Victims, Primary Victims, Immediate Victims, or Direct Victims

*Suggested Talking Points:*

Victims, primary victims, immediate victims, or direct victims are those individuals who directly experience the crime or those whom the offender directly harms. Some victims choose to call themselves survivors. The term “survivor” is also used to refer to family members and close friends of a homicide victim.

2. Secondary Victims or Co-Victims

*Suggested Talking Points:*

Secondary victims or co-victims are those individuals who have a close relationship with the victim. A ripple or domino effect refers to how the effects of a crime can travel throughout a community, affecting both those who are close to the victim and those who do not know the victim, but hear about the crime.

*Suggested Talking Points:*

The impact of crime may spread to:

- The victim’s immediate family (spouse, partner, parents, children).
- The victim’s extended family (nieces, uncles).
- The victim’s social circle (friends).
- The victim’s coworkers.
- The criminal justice personnel (prosecutors, judges, victim advocates).
- The first responders (law enforcement, medical personnel, clergy).
- Those assisting victims (insurance agents, funeral directors, counselors).
- Community members in general.

OVC, 2005
Slide 10.

3. The Victim in a Criminal Case

Suggested Talking Points:

A crucial point to consider is that although there are people who are the direct and indirect victims of criminal activity, in a criminal case it is the state that is considered the injured or victimized party. For example, if John Smith assaulted Matthew Johnson in New York, the criminal case would be State of New York v John Smith, not Johnson v Smith. This fact helps explain why a victim has little or no control over the decisions made by the different officials (police, prosecutors, court and corrections personnel) in the processing of a criminal case.

References


Most of the material in this curriculum kit has been taken from this resource.

University of Massachusetts Lowell. (2013). “Who is a victim of crime?” Lowell, MA

Discussion Questions

A. Definition of Crime Victim

1. What is your definition of a victim? Who or what does your definition include? Who or what does your definition exclude? Why?

2. Is it possible for a victim to become an offender? If John verbally threatens Mike and Mike shoots and kills John, who is the victim and who is the offender? What are the significant facts that would determine your decision as to who is the victim and who is the offender?
National Resources for Crime Victims

Crime victims and those who know them or work with them can face a number of issues for which support can be helpful. Listed below are a number of national resources. Other places to look for support can be Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) at work, campus resources for college students, and state victim assistance programs.

Victims of Crime
The National Center for Victims of Crime
www.victimsofcrime.org/help-for-crime-victims

National Organization for Victim Assistance
800-TRY-NOVA
www.trynova.org/

Office for Victims of Crime Directory of Crime Victims Services
http://ovc.ncjrs.gov/findvictimservices/

Child Abuse
Stop It Now! (sexual abuse)
888-PREVENT
www.stopitnow.org/

Clergy Center for Security on Campus
Office: (484) 580-8754
www.clerycenter.org/

Drunk Driving
MADD Victim/Survivor Helpline
877-MADD-HELP (623-3435)
www.madd.org/victim-services/
Elder Abuse
National Center on Elder Abuse
800-677-1116 (M-F, 9 a.m. – 8 p.m.)
www.ncea.aoa.gov

Homicide
National Organization of Parents Of Murdered Children
888-818-POMC
www.pomc.com/

Identity Theft
Federal Trade Commission’s Identity Theft Hotline
877-ID-THEFT (438-4338)

Identity Theft Resource Center Victim Assistance Center
888-400-5530
www.idtheftcenter.org/v_resources/v_intro.shtml

Intimate Partner Violence and Family Violence
National Domestic Violence Hotline
800-799-SAFE (7233)
www.ndvh.org/

Sexual Violence
RAINN National Sexual Assault Hotline
800-656-HOPE (4673)
http://online.rainn.org/ (online hotline)