

Module 2: Crime and Victims of Crime

Purpose

The purpose of this module is to identify the issues impacting victims of crime and the specific issues impacting crime victims with disabilities.

Lessons

1. Crime in the U.S.
2. Issues Impacting Victims of Crime

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Discuss the prevalence of crime in the U.S.
- Identify two major resources that are used as indicators of crime.
- Identify key issues impacting victims of crime and specifically issues impacting crime victims with disabilities.

Participant Worksheets

No worksheets are required.

1. Crime in the U.S.

There are two major resources that are usually consulted when discussing crime statistics:

- The FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) – crimes reported by law enforcement.
- The Bureau of Justice Statistic’s National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) – reported and unreported crime from the victim’s perspective. Like many other indicators used to assess conditions in the United States, these two indicators of crime complement each other to produce a more comprehensive portrait of the Nation’s crime problem.

Some of the differences between UCR and NCVS are:

	UCR	NCVS
Geographic Coverage	National and state estimates, local agency reports.	National estimates.
Collection Method	Reports by law enforcement to the FBI on a monthly basis.	Survey of 42,093 households and 77,852 individuals age 12 or older were interviewed.
Measures	Index crimes (seven serious crimes) reported by law enforcement.	Reported and unreported crime; details about the crimes, victims, and offenders.

Appendix C, The Nation’s two crime measures, in the Participant Manual, details the differences between the data collection methods used by UCR and NCVS.

You may want to compare the two sets of data later, but for now let’s take a closer look at the UCR report. According to 2010 figures compiled in the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Uniform Crime Report, the number of violent crimes – which include murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault – declined in 2010 for the fourth year in a row, 6 percent compared to 2009. Despite this decrease there were still an estimated 1,246,248 violent crimes in the U.S.

Property crimes declined 2.7 percent in 2010, marking the eighth straight year these offenses dropped below the previous year’s total. However, these crimes are still prevalent. Collectively, victims of property crime lost an estimated \$15.7 billion in 2010.

Appendix D in the Participant Manual is a summary table of violent crime data as compiled by the 2010 FBI Uniform Crime Report.

Other than a spike in 2001 – which was probably related to 9/11 – the number of hate crimes has remained relatively consistent. This chart on the PowerPoint slide shows the victim trend from 2000 to 2010.

Hate crimes are defined as crimes motivated by bias because of a victim's race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity/national origin, or disability.

The UCR reported that there were 6,624 single-bias reported hate crimes in 2010. Of these:

- 3,949 stemmed from racial bias.
- 1,552 percent resulted from religious bias.
- 1,528 were biased by sexual orientation.
- 1,122 were motivated by bias against ethnicity or national origin.
- 48 resulted from biases against people with disabilities.

The fact is people with disabilities are more likely to be victims of crime than people without disabilities.

In November 2011, the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics released its long-awaited *Crime Against People with Disabilities, 2008-2010* report. This report is based on data collected in the National Crime Victimization Study. According to the study, young and middle-aged people with disabilities experienced higher rates of violence than people of similar ages without disabilities.

The report states that in 2010, people age 12 or older with disabilities experienced approximately 567,000 nonfatal violent crimes, including:

- Rape or sexual assault (34,750).
- Robbery (97,970).
- Aggravated assaults (149,730).
- Simple assaults (284,850).

Keep in mind that this data does *not* include crime victims who acquired a disability as a result of the crime.

When compared to people *without* disabilities (age-adjusted), the *Crime Against People with Disabilities, 2008-2010* report also found that:

- Overall, the rate of violent crime against people with disabilities was nearly double the rate for people without disabilities.
- The rate of rapes or sexual assaults against people with disabilities was more than three times the rate for people without disabilities.

- Females with disabilities (29 per 1,000 persons age 12 or older) experienced double the rate of violence compared to females without disabilities.
- Males with disabilities also experienced higher rates of violence (26 per 1,000 compared to 16 per 1,000).
- According to a landmark 2001 study, people with developmental disabilities are 4 to 10 times more likely to be victims of crime than other people (Petersilia, J. 2001).
- Although they also are more likely to be victimized again by the same person, it is estimated that more than 50 percent of victims never seek assistance from legal personnel or treatment service providers.
- More than half of violent crimes against people with disabilities were against those with more than one type of disability.
- Individuals with cognitive disabilities had a rate of nonfatal violent crime victimization higher than the rates for people with all other kinds of disabilities (about 30 per 1,000 persons aged 12 or older in 2010).

What does all this data show us? These crimes are greatly underreported, so the percentage is probably much larger. We can conclude that the data doesn't accurately reflect the true incidence of crime against people with disabilities. Why?

Women with disabilities are less likely to report abuse because they may be dependent on an abusive partner or caregiver for financial independence, housing, or transportation. They may also be so isolated they lack the ability to contact the appropriate resources, especially if a caregiver or partner is responsible for the abuse.

In addition, because society often questions the ability of people with disabilities to parent effectively, women with disabilities may be afraid they will lose custody of their children if they report victimization.

Even if they *do* want to report a crime, women with disabilities face complications such as:

- Believability.
- Personal assistance needs.
- Questions about their ability to care for their children, either because of their disability or because of their victimization.
- Transportation.
- Difficulties accessing courtrooms or other facilities if the crime is prosecuted.
- Speech and cognition difficulties.

- Judged too rapidly.

So it is important to remember that the data doesn't accurately reflect the true incidence of crime against people with disabilities.

Additionally, many of these acts are seen as abuse rather than crimes. "Crime" and "abuse" are very different. While acts that are abusive can be crimes, not all abusive behavior is a crime. Culture and language might reflect abuse as something *less* than a crime. When this is played out with a person with a disability, the culture has tended to overlook the criminal aspects.

2. Issues Impacting Victims of Crime

Becoming a victim of a crime is almost always a stressful experience. And unfortunately, this stress can be exacerbated by events that follow the crime. Many times, the stresses associated with crime victimization can be so disruptive an individual cannot restore his or her own emotional equilibrium. Crime victim service providers understand that if the response to a crime is not handled appropriately, the short- and long-term effects on victims can be devastating.

Most issues that confront crime victims with disabilities are issues that affect *all* crime victims. Individuals respond to crime victimization in a variety of ways, and the system that responds to crime victimization influences how an individual experiences what has happened.

These are important issues that crime victim advocates must take into consideration when providing support to crime victims with disabilities.

People with disabilities often experience different types of abuse, and these are often overlooked by family members, friends, caregivers, or the authorities. These crimes may include:

- Withholding medication.
- Withholding personal care services.
- Withholding needed medical equipment like walkers, canes, wheelchairs.
- Causing physical pain during routines of daily living.
- Physically restraining the individual.
- Making the person lie in their own waste, or failing to wash or bathe them.
- Withholding benefits or money, or otherwise controlling the person's finances without authorization.
- Using personal items or property without permission.

It's important to keep in mind that no two people are alike, no two people with disabilities are alike, and no two people with the *same* disability are alike. We can't simply say "people with disabilities need this or want that." Individuals with disabilities may or may not lack resources or support systems, be isolated, or be able to communicate in a traditional manner. There are many ways people can be impacted both by crime victimization and by disabilities, and these can fluctuate over time. To deliver the optimal services, you must learn from the crime victim. Listen for what they need, and what services would be most helpful to them in the law enforcement and criminal justice processes. Don't make assumptions!

There are a number of issues on which advocates from all disciplines can work together, such as offering appropriate resources and cross-system support, and/or providing safety plans to reduce the risk of repeated victimization. We'll talk more about these later in the training.

References

"Crime Victims with Developmental Disabilities." *Criminal Justice and Behavior*. December 2001, Vol. 28 No. 6 655-694.