Teaching about Criminal Victimization

GUIDELINES FOR FACULTY

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FOR FACULTY:
TEACHING ABOUT VICTIMIZATION

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Faculty Checklist

Teaching About Victims of Crime & Handling Student Disclosures

Presentation of course material on criminal victimization can be difficult for students, especially those who have been or know victims of crime, and may lead students to disclose personal stories of victimization.

Faculty have the responsibility to:

- Create a classroom environment that is supportive for victims of crime
- S sensitively and appropriately respond to personal disclosures of victimization

This checklist highlights important steps for faculty. The accompanying materials provide guidelines, examples, and further resources to support faculty in teaching about victimization.

Setting the Tone: Teach students how to be supportive in discussing victimization

- Discussion needs to be respectful
- Discussion needs to be sensitive
- Discussion needs to avoid victim-blaming
- Discussion needs to be confidential

Framing Material: When class subject matter may be difficult for victims of crime:

- Warn of potentially difficult subject matter
- Allow for students to leave if needed, but check in to insure they are OK
- Remind students of how to engage in self-care and get support
- Consider alternate strategies/assignments for addressing the subject matter

Preparing for Disclosures: Structure classes in a way that does not encourage personal disclosures, but can appropriately manage them if they should occur.

- Set guidelines up front (in the syllabus, in class, & online) about disclosing experiences of criminal victimization

Responding to Disclosures: Students may see faculty as experts and a safe place to talk about their experiences with victimization. Faculty have the responsibility to:

- Insure safety – is the student in imminent danger?
- Respond sensitively and appropriately
  - Knowing what to say and do -
    - Listen without interrupting
    - Be comfortable with expressions of emotion
    - Acknowledge their courage in sharing
  - Know what NOT to say and do -
    - Do not ask why or judge their actions
    - Avoid telling them what to do
    - Do not minimize what they are experiencing or feeling
  - Finding out what they need for the class -
    - How can they be successful in this class, but still supported?
- Refer to appropriate resources
  - On campus
  - In the community
  - Identify trusted and potentially supportive family and friends
- Follow up if appropriate

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Teaching about Criminal Victimization

GUIDELINES FOR FACULTY

Criminal victimization is a far too common experience (see supplementary materials on the nature and extent of criminal victimization that accompany these guidelines) – which means that many of the students who are in our classes have been victims of crime and experienced physical, financial, or emotional harm as a result of the commission of a crime or know someone who has. Victimization knows no boundaries – not gender, age, sexual orientation, disability status, race or ethnic identification, or any other category. While impact of criminal victimization varies widely, it can have very profound lasting negative effects (see supplementary materials on the impact of criminal victimization that accompany these guidelines).

These guidelines are designed to provide support to college and university faculty in teaching about criminal victimization. Faculty DO NOT have to be therapists or experts on criminal victimization to teach responsibly and with sensitivity about victims of crime. In fact, it is not in students’ best interests for faculty to try to act as therapists, as that is not their role. However, faculty DO need to take a few simple steps to create a supportive learning environment for students, especially those who have been victims of crime, and faculty have to be prepared to handle disclosures that occur in or outside the classroom, and provide appropriate support and referrals. In fact, faculty sensitivity, course materials or class discussion may serve as the impetus that leads students to seek needed referrals for help and support. Key to this is to provide students with guidelines and promote a climate of support. Faculty need to know how to avoid contributing to the harm victimization has caused and be aware of simple steps that may make a profound difference for a victim of crime, as the reactions of others to victims of crime are an important predictor of how much that experience will impact the victim. Faculty can make a significant, positive difference in helping students who are victims of crime integrate their experiences and be successful (see, for example the experiences of a student recounted in Sebold, 1999). Similarly, the reactions and responses of other students may have a lasting impact as well.

SETTING THE TONE

From the start, faculty need to create a classroom environment that is supportive of victims of crime. This involves being respectful, using care in talking about victims of crime, and specifically addressing some of the concerns and issues of crime victims. This approach may be helpful and supportive not just for students who are victims of crime, but also for students who have suffered other trauma, such as returning veterans of war.

During the first day of the course or the first day that faculty will cover material about criminal victimization, take a few minutes to set the tone. Talk to students about why it is important to study and talk about criminal victimization, but that it needs to be done in a respectful and non-judgmental way. Faculty can model this in their own speech. For example, by using the word "experience" instead of "suffer" victimization and by using examples of both males and females as victims. Also be clear to separate the details of particular cases and the politics of crime and criminal justice from the issues of victims’ rights and services. Below are some examples of possible talking points.
Discussion needs to be respectful—tell students:

- We all come from different backgrounds and have different experiences, and we all have something important to share to add to the educational experiences of everyone in the class.

Discussion needs to be sensitive - ask students to:

- Always remember to be sensitive to what others say.
- Remember to think before you say things or react in any way, especially in reaction to some of the personal stories we may learn about.
  - Saying that something that happened to a victim of crime is gross or disgusting can have a very negative impact.
  - Saying that a victim must have been permanently harmed or effected by a crime can have a very negative impact.
- Remember that you do not know what those around you have experienced, and because victimization is all too common, there will be people in the room who have been victims of crime or know someone who has.

Discussion needs to avoid victim-blaming - ask students to:

- Be careful not to play the blame game, which is not productive. We are not here to make victims of crime feel worse about what happened to them, but to learn more about what the issues they face are.
- Questions about the victim’s behavior preceding the crime can help understand the dynamics of crime. However victim blaming (Why were they there at that time of night? Were they drinking? What were they wearing? Why were they carrying so much cash with them?) could have a negative impact on the victim. Talking about prevention is important, but that is not the same as blaming. Leave the blame where it belongs – with the person who chose to commit a crime.

Discussion needs to be confidential - model this behavior:

- Tell students that if and when a fellow classmate shares a story of victimization (their own or another’s), that should stay in the classroom unless you are told otherwise.
- Faculty may say something like, “Thank you for sharing with the class. I know everyone here appreciates it and recognizes the courage it took you to do that. We will keep this information confidential so you can continue to decide when you want to share your story with others.”

FRAMING MATERIAL REGARDING VICTIMS OF CRIME

When class materials, be it a video, guest speaker, activity, reading, assignment, or lecture, include subject matter that may be difficult for victims of crime, it is important to preface them with a disclaimer of sorts.

 Warn of potentially difficult subject matter

- For example “The film today includes a victim of sexual assault talking in detail about her assault and her life since. Many people find this material difficult.”

 Allow for students to leave if needed

- Announce that students who find the material difficult are free to quietly leave, but that the professor reserves the right to follow up to check on them.
• Announce that some students have talked to you and will be leaving class early for other commitments, and will make sure to leave quietly. This should help those who would like to leave be more comfortable doing so. (Newman, 1999)

Remind students of how to engage in self-care and get support
• Remind students that if they do find the subject matter difficult either right away or at a later date, there are resources available on campus, in the community, and online to help them (a listing of national resources is included in the supplementary materials to these guidelines).
• For potentially difficult readings or other outside of class materials, suggest reading them in private or with a trusted family member or close friend present, not in public.
• For in class, students can “zone out”

Consider offering alternate strategies and/or assignments for addressing the subject matter
• For videos, if a student approaches faculty with concerns, discuss with the student the opportunity to view the video outside of class. This may mean having them view the video on their own time in a more private setting, such as a faculty member’s office. As a part of this, discuss with the student that viewing in class can give the opportunity to hear what others have to say about the video, which they will miss viewing it outside of class. If they do view the video outside of class, faculty should make sure the student has been given appropriate support resources and will talk to the faculty after viewing the video.
• For guest speakers, video or audiotape them (with their permission) and make that available in an alternate setting to students

PREPARING FOR DISCLOSURES

Teaching about criminal victimization often produces personal disclosures of victimization experiences from students. These disclosures may occur in the classroom, online, or on an assignment. It is important to structure classes that deal with subject matter on criminal victimization in a way that does not encourage personal disclosures, but can appropriately manage them if they should occur.

While it can be important for victims to talk about their experiences and they should not be afraid to talk about them, the classroom (or in an online class environment) typically is not an appropriate environment for such disclosures. Disclosures in the classroom is of particular concern because of the non-confidential nature of the setting, where faculty cannot guarantee that other students will be judicious in their sharing of material, and because faculty cannot be certain that the reactions of other students to disclosures will be appropriate.

Victimization disclosures from students should not be actively sought or encouraged by faculty or class assignments, but they may still happen. Faculty need to be prepared to respond to disclosures in an appropriate and supportive manner, including providing referrals to resources and insuring the immediate safety and stability of the student. Faculty should NOT act as therapists (even if trained as a therapist). That would be inappropriate in this situation.

In order to guard against a troubled student making accusations of impropriety against a faculty member, faculty should be cautious about being in a room alone with a student without a colleague or another witness present.
Set guidelines up front about disclosing experiences of criminal victimization in class

- Include statements on the syllabus and on a course web page. Some examples are below.
  - “Due to the difficult nature of the material addressed in class, you may experience a need or desire to process some of your own personal experiences with violence and victimization. This is a completely normal and reasonable response given the subject matter. While the classroom is not the appropriate venue for this processing to take place, I am available outside of the classroom to offer support and provide referrals as necessary. For your reference, here are a few resources you may wish to utilize.”
  - “Warning: The material covered in class is not hypothetical and reflects experiences shared by many individuals including individuals enrolled in the course. It is not unusual for students to have experienced some of the abuses discussed. These personal associations may bring up strong feelings for students. If you feel the material is bringing up issues for you that are affecting your ability to be successful in the course, please take advantage of the University counseling center and/or see the instructor.”

- On the first day of class or first day of material on crime victims, make an announcement like the following: “I understand that unfortunately victimization is all too common, so many of you may have had personal experiences. This can be very difficult. While it is totally understandable that you may have reactions to the subject matter of the course, class is not an appropriate place to try and discuss or process those feelings. I am available outside of class to provide support and referrals to appropriate resources. There are also resources listed in the syllabus and on the course website for you to consider using.”

- If the contents of an assignment are going to be shared with the class, either in a physical class or in an online environment, make sure students know that at the outset of the assignment. In addition, assignments should be structured in ways that would not encourage disclosure of victimization. Disclosures of victimization should not be encouraged or required as a part of a course or assignment.

- Remind students that although they may know relevant experiences to share that others have had, that type of information (disclosing the victimization of others) should only be shared in a way that keeps the victim anonymous, if at all.

Responding to Student Disclosures

Students may see faculty, especially those teaching about criminal victimization, as experts and as a safe place to talk about their experiences with victimization. Faculty may (or may not) be experts on victimization in an academic sense, but it is not their role to be counselors for students. Instead, faculty have the responsibility to:

- Insure safety
- Respond sensitively and appropriately
- Refer to appropriate resources
- Follow up if appropriate
Insuring Safety
When a student discloses victimization, regardless of how long ago what was disclosed occurred, insure that the student is in no immediate danger. Some possible questions to use are below.

- Are you in any danger now?
- Do you have a safe place to go after we finish talking?
- Are you afraid to go home or back to where you live?

Responding Sensitively & Appropriately - Knowing what to do and say
When a student discloses a victimization, they are expecting it to be a safe space, where they will not be judged and people will want to help and support them. Listen to their story without interrupting, maintain eye contact, and smile or nod encouragingly as needed. This may mean having to be comfortable with crying (having tissues available in faculty offices is recommended) and strong expressions of emotion, as well as periods of silence. Remember faculty are not the police, so their role is to believe the student and reinforce that the student is not to blame for the victimization, not to find out what really happened. If a disclosure happens in class, the faculty’s demeanor and body language and what faculty say once the student stops sets the tone for other students to follow. It is similar in an online environment, in that the faculty would hopefully get to be the first to respond to the disclosure, to set the tone for others. Below are some suggestions for how to initially respond.

- Thank you for sharing with me (or with us, if in a classroom setting). That took a lot of courage.
- I am sorry this happened to you.
- I appreciate that you chose to share this with me. What can I do to help?

Some examples of a follow up to the initial response are below.

- This was not your fault.
- You are not to blame.

If a disclosure happens on a written assignment or online, faculty should follow up with the student to insure that the student is safe and is aware of available resources for support.

If the disclosure happens in the class, take care in asking any follow on questions. The point is to make sure the student feels heard and supported, not to determine what happened or to fix the problem. Some examples of what to say for follow on are below.

- Student A (student who disclosed) spoke very eloquently about this point. I'd like to expand on what researchers have found related to that.

Occasionally a student disclosing in class will go on at length and really be processing inappropriately in class. This can be a difficult situation. Try to tactfully intervene and draw the conversation back to the planned course material. Below is one suggestion for dealing with that situation. Afterwards, or if it happens repeatedly, consult campus counseling services or a local crisis line for professional guidance in handling the situation.

- Excuse me. I am very sorry to have to ask you to stop, since this is obviously important. Unfortunately there is some material we have to cover today, so I am going to need to move on now. If you have a few minutes after class, I'd love to talk about this more.

Responding Sensitively & Appropriately - Knowing what NOT to do and say
The way people respond to disclosures by victims of crime can help or hurt those victims. In general, avoid questioning their decisions, blaming them for what happened, minimizing what
happened or how they are feeling, and telling them what to do. To avoid sounding judgmental or not being supportive, below are some examples of phrases to avoid.

- That's terrible.
- You should…
- Why did you…
- You need to…
- It could have been worse.
- I know how you feel.
- If it were me,…

**Responding Sensitively & Appropriately - Find out what they need for the class**

If the subject matter of the course has been difficult for a student, determine what it is that they may need to continue in the course and be successful. This is best handled as a private conversation, perhaps during office hours or by appointment. If necessary, such as in an online course, this may also be done via phone or email. This may require asking questions to determine what is needed. In asking questions, some basic guidelines are provided below.

- What is it that I need to know in order to help this person?
- What type of question (open-ended or closed-ended) will get me the information I need?
- How can I ask this question without having a negative impact on the victim of crime?

Some possibilities are:

- **It sounds like parts of the class are difficult for you. Can you tell me what parts you feel like you have not been able to do?**
- **If there are parts of the class that you are finding difficult, can we talk about other ways we might handle this?**
- **It sounds like watching videos in class has you concerned that you might have a strong reaction. Would it be easier for you to watch them in my office?**

Before engaging in this type of conversation, it is important to be familiar with any options the college or university may offer to accommodate students who are victims of crime. There are typically not legal requirements of the college or university, but there may be helpful policies in place that either are specific to students who were victims of crime (or victims of particular types of crime), or for students who are having mental or physical health problems. The Dean of Students and/or Registrar should be familiar with what accommodations are available. Some accommodations for their particular course that a faculty can consider include:

- Alternate viewing of difficult material
- Alternate readings – perhaps more research based than narrative or personal stories (if applicable)
- Alternate assignments
- Arranging for a student to be able to leave class as needed (but take steps so that the student will not then be identified as a victim of crime)
- Incomplete
- Withdrawal

Many students worry that asking for an accommodation will result in a lower grade or the faculty member thinking less of them as a student. Take steps to reassure the student that is not the case. This is especially important if a student is considering withdrawing. Many students will not ask for a withdrawal, even when it might be appropriate. It is sometimes helpful to suggest a withdrawal if deemed needed. For example, “It sounds like you have a lot going on this semester. I am not saying you should withdraw, but if that is an option that you want to consider,
please know that I would not think any less of you and I would be happy to see you in another
class in a future semester."

Refer to Appropriate Resources
Faculty should be aware of the appropriate professional resources for students who are victims
of crime. Included in the supplementary materials with these guidelines is a list of national
resources for victims of crime. It’s best to use these to develop a short list of local and campus
resources that can be used to refer students, as well as including some national resources.
Campus resources to list typically include counseling, health services, college chaplain/faith
community, dean of students, women’s center, and campus police. 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. Below is some suggested language for providing referrals in
person.

- I am here to listen and support you, but it would also be helpful for you to talk to
  someone who has specialized knowledge in this area.
- I appreciate it when students come to me, but because my training is in how to teach and
  research, I always provide people with the numbers of agencies trained to help, just in
  case.
- We all need help to get through life. I wanted to share some information with you in case
  you ever need it.
- If you think it might help, here is a list I give to students with groups that can help.

It also can be helpful to students to help them identify people in their life who might also serve
as trusted support people. This may include parents/guardians, siblings, other family members,
friends, faith community leaders, and co-workers.

Be aware of any state and campus reporting requirements that apply to college and university
faculty. Faculty may or may not be considered mandated reporters of child abuse and the abuse
of dependent elders in their state. There also may be campus reporting requirements related to
sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and other types of victimization. Typically these
reports are easy to fill out and do not require identification of the victim. If you have questions
about these policies, a good place to ask about them is Campus Police. If faculty are bound to
report certain information that would identify the student to outsiders, they should disclose those
requirements to the student up front.

In rare cases, a faculty member may be concerned that a student is an imminent danger to
themselves or others. In such a case, call the appropriate campus support systems (typically
Dean of Students (to be sure there is a proper response), campus counseling center or, in rare
emergencies, campus police). Unless this would escalate the situation to unsafe levels, the
student should be told that the call is being made and why, and reassured that the faculty
member will stay with them until help arrives.

FOLLOW UP

If a student has disclosed in class or in private to a faculty member, a quick follow up provides
additional support. This should not be done publicly. For example, after a disclosure in class,
send an email to a student to thank them for sharing and check if they need additional support
resources. Below is a suggested format to customize.
Thank you again for sharing your story today. I appreciate that you felt comfortable enough to talk about it. When students share stories in class, I usually follow up. If there is a way I can help, please let me know. Also, I always like to share some outside support resources in case you or someone you know ever needs them.

If you are concerned that a student’s email is not secure (for example, they are a victim of intimate partner violence), a more generic email would be appropriate.

Thank you for your participation in class today. If you would like to discuss this further, my office hours this week are (fill in office hours) or by appointment.

At the end of a private conversation, such as in office hours, faculty should review anything that has been agreed to. If it is safe to do so, what has been agreed to should also be included in a follow up email. End with a final statement of support.

We agreed that you will view the video in my office next Tuesday and as soon as you leave, I'll also email that to you so we have a record of what we worked out. Thank you again for sharing with me what has been going on for you. That helps me work with you to be successful in the class. If there is something else or things change, please let me know.

**FACULTY PREPARATION**

With preparation and awareness, faculty can be successful teaching about victims of crime and hopefully find it very rewarding. Supplementary material is provided to help faculty be successful. These include reading materials that provide more information on the nature, extent, and impact of criminal victimization, referral resources for victims of crime, suggested readings and additional resources, and a course preparation worksheet.

Teaching about criminal victimization and handling disclosures from students can be emotionally difficult for faculty, some of who may have been affected themselves by crime. Faculty should acknowledge this, and remember to engage in self-care and use the referral resources for themselves when necessary.
SUGGESTED READINGS & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES


CITED MATERIALS


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. The websites with asterisks (*) also include listings of state and/or local resources for support. 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

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

Drunk Driving

Elder Abuse
National Center on Elder Abuse .................. 800-677-1116 (M-F, 9 a.m. – 8 p.m.)* .......................................................... http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/ncearoot/Main_Site/index.aspx*

Homicide

Identity Theft

Intimate Partner Violence & Family Violence

Sexual Violence
RAINN National Sexual Assault Hotline .................. 800-656-HOPE (4673) .......................................................... http://online.rainn.org/ (online hotline)
Teaching About Victims of Crime
Faculty Self-Assessment
By Alison C. Cares
University of Massachusetts Lowell

The questions below serve as a self-assessment for faculty as they prepare to teach course content regarding victims of crime. Please answer the questions honestly, self-score yourself, and review the provided faculty guidelines and supplemental materials if necessary.

1. If a student discloses to you that they were recently the victim of an assault, the best response is:
   a. That's terrible. I feel so sorry for you.
   b. Of my gosh! Were you drinking?
   c. I know how you feel, but it will get better.
   d. I'm sorry that happened to you.

2. The best policy to deal with student disclosures of victimization in class is:
   a. Include a statement in the syllabus that no personal disclosures are allowed.
   b. Encourage students who are victims to share in class if they want.
   c. Have a designated personal stories day, with optional participation.
   d. Include a statement in the syllabus that discourages personal disclosures.

3. If a student discloses a victimization in class, the best approach is to:
   a. Ignore it and call on someone else.
   b. Express your sympathies and quickly move on.
   c. Express your interest and ask for them to talk about it in more detail.
   d. Thank them for sharing.

4. A student tells you that they were recently the victim of a sexual assault and that is has been very difficult for them to get up and come to class and to focus on school work. What should you do?
   a. Encourage them to set a sleep schedule and stick to it.
   b. Send them to the academic skills center for help with study skills.
   c. Call the police and report the sexual assault.
   d. Provide them with a rape crisis hotline and discuss any options for accommodations for your class.

5. Victim related resources can be shared:
   a. In the syllabus
   b. On a course web page
   c. On a faculty web page
   d. All of the above

6. The appropriate time to announce guidelines about sharing personal stories in class is:
   a. On the first day of class
   b. Immediately after a student discloses a victimization
   c. To start each class
   d. Only on days when you think the material might elicit disclosures from students

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7. A student discloses to you that they were recently a victim of an assault, what are the first three things you might say?

1. ____________________________________________________________

2. ____________________________________________________________

3. ____________________________________________________________

8. What are the top three resources for referral you might provide that student?

1. ____________________________________________________________

2. ____________________________________________________________

3. ____________________________________________________________

Please self-score your answers:
Question 1: 1 point for d, 0 points for others
Question 2: 1 point for d, 0 points for others
Question 3: 1 point for d, 0 points for others
Question 4: 1 point for d, 0 points for others
Question 5: 1 point for d, 0 points for others
Question 6: 1 point for a, 0 points for others _____

Total: _______

6-7 Points  You are well prepared, but just double check that you have thought about what to say to a student and have a list of resources for referral prepared

4-5 Points You are on your way, but it would be a good idea to re-review the faculty guidelines and further define a plan for responding to students and your list of resources for referral

0-3 Points You need a better developed plan, which would be helped by re-reading the faculty guidelines, and preparing a plan for responding to students and developing a list of resources for referral.
During 2010, U.S. residents age 12 or older experienced an estimated 18.7 million violent and property crime victimizations, down from 20.1 million in 2009.  

About 50 percent of all violent victimizations and nearly 40 percent of property crimes were reported to the police in 2010.  

In 2010, households in the lowest income category (less than $7,500 per year) had a higher overall property victimization rate compared to households earning $75,000 or more.  

An estimated 14,748 persons were murdered nationwide in 2010, a 4.2 percent decline from 2009.  

In 2010, where the victim-offender relationship was known, 37.4 percent of homicide victims were killed by an acquaintance, 22.2 percent were killed by a stranger, 18.4 percent were killed by an intimate partner, 15 percent were killed by a family member, and 5.5 percent were killed by a friend.  

During a one-year period, 60.6 percent of children and youth from birth to 17 years of age experienced at least one direct or indirect (as a witness) victimization.  

Youth ages 12 to 19 with disabilities experienced violence at nearly twice the rate of those without a disability.  

During 2010, 92,865 persons over the age of 65 were victims of violent crime.  

In 2009, 6,604 hate crime incidents were reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation by local law enforcement agencies, a decrease of 15.2 percent since 2008.  

In 2010, an estimated 8.1 million adults became victims of identity fraud, down from about 11 million in 2009.  

In 2010, the leading identity theft complaints to the FTC included government documents and benefits fraud (19 percent), credit card fraud (15 percent), phone or utilities fraud (14 percent), and employment-related fraud (11 percent).  

In 2010, victims age 12 or older experienced a total of 188,380 rapes or sexual assaults.  

According to the U.S. Department of State, there are as many as 27 million men, women and children in forced labor, bonded labor, and forced prostitution around the world.  

Four-fifths (83 percent) of victims in confirmed sex trafficking incidents were identified as U.S. citizens.  

During a one-year period, 3.4 million people ages 18 or older in the United States were stalked.  

In 2009, there were 10,839 alcohol-impaired driving fatalities (32 percent of all traffic fatalities) involving a driver with a blood-alcohol content (BAC) of .08 or greater, a decline of 7.4 percent from 2008.  

In 2009, 17.5 percent of students in grades 9 through 12 had carried a weapon in the previous 30 days, including about 5.9 percent of students who had carried a gun.  

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2 Ibid.  

3 Ibid, 12.  


12 Jennifer L. Truman, “Criminal Victimization, 2010,” Table 1.  


In a 2008 report (most recent year this data was collected), for crimes both reported and not reported to the police, the total economic loss to victims was $1.19 billion for violent crime and $16.21 billion for property crime.

In 2010, an estimated $456 million in losses were attributed to robberies reported to the police. The average dollar value of property stolen per robbery offense was $1,239.

In 2010, there were an estimated 6,185,867 larceny-thefts reported to the police nationwide. The average value of property taken during larceny-thefts was $988 per offense. Nationally, the loss to victims was over $6.1 billion.

In 2010, the average dollar loss due to arson was $17,612.

In 2010, households in the lowest income category (less than $7,500 per year) had a higher overall property victimization rate (16.8 per 1,000 households), compared to households earning $75,000 or more (119.3 per 1,000).

An estimated 27,500 fires were intentionally set to structures in 2010, an increase of 3.8 percent from 2009. These fires resulted in 200 civilian deaths and $585 million in property loss (a decrease of 14.5 percent from 2009).

Approximately 14,000 fires were intentionally set to vehicles in 2010, resulting in $89 million in property damage, a 17.6 percent decrease from 2009.

In 2010, the average dollar loss per burglary offense was $2,119. The total amount lost to burglaries was an estimated $4.6 billion.

Victim compensation programs distributed $499.9 million in 2010.

In 2009, the total amount of money lost from all cases of Internet fraud referred to law enforcement for investigation was $559.7 million. This was more than double the amount of $264.6 million reported in 2008. The median dollar loss in 2009 was $575 per complaint.

In 2009, consumers reporting fraud to the Federal Trade Commission lost a total of more than $1.7 billion dollars.
Mental Health consequences of crime

According to a 2003 study, crime victims have a much higher lifetime incidence of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than people who have not been victimized (25 percent versus 9 percent).1

This same study found that almost 27 percent of women and 12 percent of men who have been molested develop PTSD later in life.2

Women who experienced a homicide of a family member or close friend have higher levels of PTSD than non-homicide survivors; 22 percent experience lifetime PTSD, and 9 percent currently have PTSD.3

Of crime victims diagnosed with PTSD, 37 percent also suffer from depression.4

The most comprehensive comorbidity study to date showed that lifetime prevalence of other psychological disorders in male and female crime victims with PTSD is 88 and 79 percent, respectively. The most common comorbid disorders are depression, substance abuse, and phobia.5

The estimated risk of developing posttraumatic stress disorder is 49 percent for survivors of rape, 32 percent for survivors of severe beating or physical assault, 24 percent for survivors of other sexual assault, 15 percent for survivors of a shooting or stabbing, and 7 percent for those who witness a murder or an assault.6

Major depressive disorder affects an estimated one-third of all women who are raped, often for an extended period of time. One-third of women who are raped contemplate suicide and 17 percent attempt suicide.7

Intimate partner victimization against American women ages 18 and older results in more than 18.5 million mental health care visits each year.8

In a study of domestic violence victims who had obtained a protective order, significantly more women who were stalked after receiving the order reported PTSD symptoms than women who were not stalked after obtaining a protective order.9

A study of Medicare and Medicaid records found that elders who called an elder abuse hotline were twice as likely to use behavioral health services than elders who did not call a hotline.10

In a national study of adolescents, 28 percent of boys who had been sexually assaulted had had PTSD at some point in their lives, as compared to 5.4 percent of boys nationally. For girls, 30 percent of sexual assault victims had had PTSD, versus 7 percent of all girls nationally.11

In a large-scale study of adults, the more types of abuse respondents had experienced as children, the worse their mental health as adults.12

In 2008, 8 percent of medical expense payments made through victim compensation funds were for mental health counseling for crime victims.13

Roughly one-third of mental health care bills for rape, physical assault, and stalking victims were paid for out of pocket.14

A 2003 study found that women with high scores on a PTSD screening test had median annual health care costs of $1,283, while those scoring low on the screening test had median costs of just $609.15

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 127.
5 Ibid., 129.
THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF CRIMINAL VICTIMIZATION

By David Hirschel
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INTRODUCTION
There are literally hundreds of criminal offenses on the statute books to which people can fall victim. In this section we are focusing on the direct victims, the people who are directly harmed by criminal activity, such as the convenience store clerk who is murdered, the college student who is sexually assaulted, the retired engineer who is hit and seriously injured by someone who was driving while under the influence of alcohol, the suburban couple whose house is broken into, and the salesman whose car is stolen. We are not focusing on those offenses where there is no clear victim, except, as some would argue, the person who actually commits the offense. Crimes such as illegal possession of narcotics and gambling can be considered crimes without any direct victims.

One way in which we have traditionally divided crimes with direct victims is to consider them either crimes of violence or property crimes. Murder, rape, robbery, and assault are examples of crimes of violence. Burglary and theft are examples of property crimes. Theft can take many forms, including theft of items such as jewelry and computer equipment, theft of an automobile, and identity theft.

DATA SOURCES
In our quest to obtain a picture of both the extent and nature of criminal victimization in the USA, we are dependent, unless we are going to collect our own data, on the data sources that exist and the data elements that are included in those sources. We have two types of data sources that provide us national information about crime and criminal victimization on a yearly basis. (1) Police based data that give us information about offenses reported to the police; and, (2) Victimization estimates based on surveys of a representative sample of the population.

1. Police Data Sources
The Federal Bureau’s Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) provides information on crimes reported to the police. It has tracked data on seven crimes since 1930: murder, robbery, rape, aggravated assault, burglary, theft and motor vehicle theft. In 1979, the UCR started reporting on arson. Due to the differences in individual state statutes throughout the United States, a definition for each crime was established to ensure uniformity. Today, nearly 17,000 law enforcement agencies report UCR data to the FBI.

The UCR data have, however, several limitations that prevent them from providing an accurate picture of the extent and nature of criminal victimization in the USA. The UCR

- only cover eight categories of offense. While, for example, the UCR provides data on the number of aggravated assaults reported to the police, they do not provide similar information for simple assaults.
- do not provide any information on offenses that have not been reported to the police.
- do not provide specific information on each incident. In particular, the UCR does not provide information about the characteristics of the victim and offender and the injuries they received.

In response to law enforcement's need for more flexible, in-depth data, the Uniform Crime Reporting Program formulated the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).
NIBRS enhances the UCR data because it describes details about 46 types of criminal activity. Officers record specific information about each incident, including unique descriptions of victims and offenders, a description of each crime that occurred at the scene, and whether an arrest was made. Implementation of NIBRS has been commensurate with the resources, abilities, and limitations of the contributing law enforcement agencies. Although participation grows steadily, data are still not pervasive enough to make broad generalizations about crime in the United States.

2. Victimization Data

Victimization data have been collected each year since 1972 by the National Crime Victim Survey (NCVS), which was designed to complement the UCR. The survey was redesigned in 1993 to update survey methods, improve the screen questions designed to uncover crime, and broaden the scope of crimes measured.

- Each year, the U.S. Bureau Census personnel obtain data from a nationally representative sample of roughly 45,000 households comprising more between 75,000 and 95,000 persons aged twelve and over on the frequency, characteristics and consequences of criminal victimization in the United States.

- The survey fully reports the likelihood of victimization for rape, sexual assault, robbery, assault, theft, household burglary, and motor vehicle theft for the population as a whole as well as for segments of the population such as women, the elderly, members of various racial groups, city dwellers, and other groups.

THE EXTENT AND NATURE OF VICTIMIZATION

While the number of people who fall victim to crime each year is large, the encouraging news is that one is more likely to be the victim of a minor crime than the victim of a serious crime. Thus, you are more likely to have something stolen from you than to be assaulted and you are more likely to be the victim of a misdemeanor assault than a felonious assault. Serious crimes, such as murder and rape are, however, far more likely to be covered by the news media than are minor property crimes and assaults. Thus, it is easy to develop an inaccurate picture of the extent to which different types of crime occur.

1. Criminal Homicide

This is the one crime for which we can use UCR and NIBRS data for an accounting of victimization. This is because

- Nearly all homicides come to the attention of the police.
- The UCR has a supplementary homicide report that provides information about the incident and the victim and offender.
- Victimization surveys cannot be used to provide data on homicide. There is no victim to interview!

An examination of UCR data shows that the criminal homicide rate rose steadily to a peak of 10.2 homicides per 100,000 population in 1980 and has declining somewhat steadily since then. Since 1998 the rate has been under 6.0. The UCR include murder and non-negligent homicide as criminal homicide.
In 2008
- 16,272 people were the victims of murder and non negligent manslaughter, a rate of 5.4
  homicides per 100,000 population, down considerably from the peak rate of 10.2 in 1980.
- 78.2 percent of the victims were male. 90% of the offenders were male
- 49.0% of the victims were white, 48.6% were black, and 2.3% were from other races.
- 51.5% of the offenders were black, 46.2% were white, and 2.4% were from other races.
- 23.3% of victims were killed by family members, 22.0% were murdered by strangers, and
  54.7% were slain by acquaintances (neighbor, friend, boyfriend, etc.).
- 23.3% of victims were slain by family members, 22.0% were murdered by strangers, and
  54.7% were killed by acquaintances (neighbor, friend, boyfriend, etc.).
- 71.9% of the homicides involved the use of firearms. Of the identified firearms used,
  handguns comprised 88.3%.ii

The above data for 2008, which are representative of other years, indicate that the typical victim
of criminal homicide is a male who is killed through use of a firearm by another male whom he
knows. While females are underrepresented among homicide victims as a whole, they are more
likely than males to be the victims of murders committed by an intimate partner.iii Young adults
aged 18 to 24 experience the highest homicide rates.iv Given their far lower representation in
the general population (about 12%), Blacks are highly overrepresented among homicide victims.

2. Other crimes of violence

Unlike homicide, many rapes and other offenses are not brought to the attention of the police.
Thus for information on these offenses we rely on the NCVS victimization surveys. The annual
data from these surveys cover victimizations of rape and sexual assault, robbery and assault,
both simple and aggravated. The data do not, however, cover victims who are less than 12
years old.
Like homicide, all categories of other violent offenses show a decline from the 1980s. This has occurred for both male and female victims.

![Graph showing violent crime rates by gender of victim](image)

In 2008 over five million people were the victims of these non lethal crimes of violence. A little over three million were the victims of simple assault. The NCVS data also show us that in 2008:

- Males experienced higher victimization rates than females for all types of violent crime except rape and sexual assault.
- Blacks experienced higher victimization rates than other races for all types of violent crime except simple assault.
- Victimization rates decreased with age. Generally, for every crime measured by the NCVS, people aged 12 to 24 had the highest rates of victimization. People aged 50 or older had the lowest rates.
- Male victims knew the offenders in half of all aggravated and simple assaults against them. Female victims knew the offenders in approximately 70% of assaults against them.
- Robbery was the crime most likely to be committed by a stranger. Strangers committed 61% of robberies against men and 45% of robberies against women.
- Divorced or separated persons and never married persons experienced similar rates of overall violence. Their rates were higher than those married or widowed.
- A gun, knife, or other object was used as a weapon in an estimated 20% of all incidents of violent crime. 

Other analyses of the NCVS data have revealed that:

- While in general males are more likely than females to be the victims of violent crime, females are more likely than males to be victimized by family violence. Between 1998 and 2002 females constituted 73.4% of the nation's victims of family violence. In 2008 intimate partners were responsible for 3% of all violence against males and 23% of all violence against females in 2008.
- Workplace violence accounted for 18% of all violent crime between 1993 and 1999. Police officers, correctional officers, taxicab drivers, private security workers, and bartenders had the highest rates of victimizations of the occupations examined.
- About a third (32%) of public and private school students ages 12-18 reported in 2007 that they have been bullied at school within the past six months.
• Age-adjusted rates of nonfatal violent crimes against persons with disabilities are 1.5 times higher than the rates for persons without disabilities. 
• In 2008 victims of violent crimes perceived their assailants to be gang members in 5% of crimes that occurred. 

3. Property crimes

The annual data from the NVCS surveys cover the crimes of household burglary, theft, and motor vehicle theft. Like all other offenses, property crimes show a decline from the 1980s. However, in 2008 there were still over 16 million people who were the victims of property crimes. Theft constituted about 75% of these victimizations.

The NCVS data also show us that in 2008:

• In general, there was an inverse relationship between property crime rates and annual household income. Lower income households had higher rates of property crime.

• Differences between the property crime rates for households in the lowest and highest income groups were smaller for theft than for burglary.

• In general, property crime rates were directly related to household size. For the most part, larger households experienced higher rates of property crime than smaller households. 

Other analyses of NCVS data have revealed that:

• Those in the highest income bracket ($75,000 or more) are the most likely to experience identity theft. 

Though the NCVS does capture crimes that have not been reported to the police, it does have its own limitations. Thus, for example, the NCVS
• Only includes cases reported to interviewers.
• Does not include children under age 12.
• Does not have third party assessment of facts as in police reports.
• Has screening questions that are not ‘state of the art.’
• Does not assure privacy for respondents.
• Is a survey of addresses, not of persons or families. People who live in high crime areas move frequently.

FEAR OF CRIME
Fear of crime does not always mesh with the realities of victimization. Research shows, for example, that women tend to be more fearful than men of becoming the victims of crime, though men have higher rates of victimization for all offenses except for rape and sexual assault.\(^{xvi}\)

Likewise, the majority of studies indicate that despite the fact that they have the least risk of victimization it is the elderly who fear criminal victimization the most.\(^xvii\) However, it should be noted that fear of victimization may lead the elderly to curtail their activities so that they do not go out and about and thus, by limiting their activities, they lower their risk of victimization.

Finally, despite the fact that we have seen that the crime rates have been declining since the 1980s, nearly every year a majority of those asked whether there is "more crime in the U.S. than there was a year ago" has answered "yes."\(^xviii\)

This erroneous image of rising crime rates may well result from the fact that most people obtain their information about crime from the news media, which by focusing on serious criminal activity may give the impression that the crime situation is continually becoming worse.

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\(^{xvi}\) Bureau of Justice Statistics. U.S. homicide trends: intimate partner violence. Available at: http://bjjsdata.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/intimates.cfm

\(^{xvii}\) Bureau of Justice Statistics. Key facts at a glance. Available at: http://bjjsdata.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/homage.cfm


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\(^{1}\) Data available at: http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/dataonline/Search/Crime/State/RunCrimeStatebyState.cfm


\(^{xvi}\) Bureau of Justice Statistics. U.S. homicide trends: intimate partner violence. Available at: http://bjjsdata.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/intimates.cfm

\(^{xvii}\) Bureau of Justice Statistics. Key facts at a glance. Available at: http://bjjsdata.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/homage.cfm

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\(^{7}\) Bureau of Justice Statistics. Location. Available at: http://bjjsdata.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=44

\(^{8}\) Bureau of Justice Statistics. Location. Available at: http://bjjsdata.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=44


\(^{10}\) Bureau of Justice Statistics. Victims and offenders. Available at: http://bjjsdata.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=2022

\(^{11}\) Bureau of Justice Statistics. Victims and offenders. Available at: http://bjjsdata.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=94

\(^{12}\) Bureau of Justice Statistics: Washington, D.C.

\(^{13}\) Bureau of Justice Statistics: Washington, D.C.

\(^{14}\) Bureau of Justice Statistics: Washington, D.C.


