Impacts and Consequences of Victimization

Aron Blesch

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Uniform Crime Reports of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the National Crime Victimization Surveys of the Bureau of Justice Statistics index crimes annually. What is more, the FBI publishes annual reports on the state of law enforcement in the United States. (Services, n.d.). Generally speaking, in the United States, violent crime has been decreasing. There are many theories that have tried to explain this decrease (Eisen, 2015).

Since the 1990s, the number of police officers has increased considerably. The rise began in 1994 when President Clinton signed into law the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. Over a six-year period to improve enforcement, more than $30 billion was spent on federal aid of state and local law enforcement, prisons, and crime prevention programs. Beginning in the mid-1970s, the U.S. prison population had begun growing in part due to habitual offender laws and later the crack and cocaine drug trade of the 1980s, before the latter's decline a decade later. Some authors have pointed out the link between violent crime and the use of crack cocaine (Eisen, 2015). While legalized abortion arguably reduced the number of children born to single mothers and unprepared families, difficult childhoods, in general, help to create offenders later on in adolescence and into adulthood. The changing demographics of the aging population have been cited by the drop in overall crime (Eisen, 2015)

Kleiman (2005) stated that CompStat data-driven policing significantly reduced crime in locales that have adopted it such as New York City. Moreover, the lead-crime hypothesis has hypothesized reduced lead exposure as a reason for the decline in crime. Kleiman (2005) also stated that reduced exposure could well explain a very large percentage of crime decreases in the ten-year 1994–2004 period. In a statistical study linking changes in lead exposure to rates of local crime, the rate of decrease due to lead reduction was estimated at greater than 90 percent.

Lastly, the quality and scope of use of security technology increased at the time of the fall in crime, after which the rate of car theft decreased. This may have caused rates of other crimes to drop as well (Kleiman, 2005). Nevertheless, the impacts and consequences of victimization abound and are hereafter addressed.

Impacts of Crime on Victims and Their Families

There are both short and long-term impacts of crime on victims and their loved ones. For example, the kidnapping of a child by a family member is one of the most devastating crises a parent can face. The impact suffered by the kidnapped child is also traumatic, as the child struggles with various feelings, most notably a feeling of betrayal and loss of confidence. These are not the only people affected by family abduction. Brothers and sisters, grandparents and other family members also suffer as do their friends.

Although the impact on the kidnapped child's life may not be so evident at first, over time, they will likely realize how being kidnapped by a parent affected their life. For a long time, they may have felt that the best way to cope with what happened to them as a child was to forget about it, to bury it in the past and leave it there. Victims coming out of the denial stage regarding the effect the incident has had on their life may consider undergoing psychological therapy to better cope with long-term consequences.

Human trafficking is a crime that also reaps considerable negative short and long-term consequences on victims. It involves sex and/or labor trafficking. There has been a marked increase in the sex trafficking of minors in past years. The commercial sexual exploitation of children can occur as follows: via child marriage, prostitution, pornography, child sex tourism. The kinds of traffickers as well as the type of trafficking can affect how victims are kidnapped,

the reason for the kidnapping, and how they are treated (Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, n.d.).

In sum, crimes against children rob them of their childhood. The offenses against them are highly detrimental to their psychological and emotional and development. As stated above, psychological therapy has a place in helping victims cope. Moreover, special community-based programs i.e. advocacy centers and child protection teams in addition to child welfare agencies and social workers can assist families in finding appropriate care as well as managing relevant legal aspects (Factsheet for Families, 2018).

Reporting Rate Issues

Certain crimes have higher reporting rates than other crimes. The violent crime rate in the U.S includes assault, sexual assault, murder, rape, and robbery according to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting. In contrast, in Canada, the violent crime rate includes all categories of assault, including an assault that does not use a weapon and does not result in serious bodily harm. A Canadian government study concluded that the direct comparison of totals or rates of violent crime for the two countries was "inappropriate." In France, minor violence is not counted such as punches or slaps, as assault, while Austria, Germany, and Finland do count such events. Similarly, what constitutes a violent crime in the United Kingdom differs when compared to the U.S. (Goudian, 2006).

The UK alternatively has a different definition of violent crime; it instead includes all "crimes against the person," including simple assaults, all robberies, and all sex crimes, in comparison to the U.S., which only counts aggravated assaults and rapes by force. Crime rates can be generally obtained by averaging a given neighborhood's highest or lowest percentage rate

over a larger population – say the entire city. A given city's average crime rate can also be lessened by having small areas of crime that is occurring in a dense fashion (Goudrian, 2006).

Goudrian (2006) developed a theoretical model to explain the reasons why victims can decide to report or not to report a crime. Its socio-ecological model includes a "cost-benefit" analysis to explain the victim's decision. Besides the costs and economic benefits of a complaint, the model contains other factors that can influence the decision such as social norms and the context in which the crime occurs. According to Goudrian, after a crime occurs the victim analyzes the costs and benefits of a complaint. The costs are, for example, transaction costs to report to the authorities (transportation costs, loss of time, etc.). An incident call center or online reporting can lower the transaction costs of reporting a crime to the police. Another cost may be the risk that the criminal wants revenge on the victim for reporting to the police. Apart from the costs of a complaint, there are also possible benefits. One of those is to prevent further crimes against oneself or others. A complaint is also for the aggressor to be punished as retribution for the act. Likewise, a complaint can be used to recover any stolen objects or to receive compensation in the event that the police arrest the perpetrator of the crime. It is also possible that a complaint is a condition for receiving an insurance payment. The victim normally performs a deliberate or possibly unconscious cost-benefit analysis. Among the factors influencing the decision to report a crime to the police are the context in which the crime occurred, if the aggressor is a known person, the culture and norms of the victim and their environment, the existence of informal instructions to resolve their degree of individualism, and the victim's trust in the authorities (Goudrian, 2006).

In short, the reasons for not reporting crimes to the police are various and are also different depending on the cultural context or by region. Undoubtedly, more research is

necessary to understand reporting variations at the international and domestic level. Perhaps it has not been a major priority for stakeholders to see an increase in the reporting rate, the result of which would mean that the crime rate rises in official statistics.

Crime Reporting Accuracy and Positive Social Change

Victimization surveys are an important tool to estimate the real amount of crime but in general only for some crimes, and the crime rate is only estimated at an aggregate level. For example, an ENVIPE 2014 study in Mexico allowed for estimating crimes at the national level and the three most frequent at the state level. The study did not allow for the design of public policies at the municipal or local level. The data from the administrative records allowed for analysis of crime and delinquency per location and over time at the local level. With this information, it was possible to identify the places and times of certain crimes and where they were most frequent so that ultimately resources could be distributed in better ways (Molzhan, 2014). Hence, studies like these can contribute to positive social change.

To continue creating positive social change in society, it is important to improve upon the issue of unreported crime; it affects crime analysis and the subsequent allocation of resources. Over three million violent crimes went unreported in the U.S. alone from 2006 to 2010 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012). It is as much an issue currently, and aside from prediction and prevention, better reporting will also improve crime data at the local level, which will help identify serial crime and methods such as geographic profiling. Although in the short term there would be more complaints, and therefore, the number of crimes registered in crime statistics would increase, in the medium and long term, the better availability and quality of data would help in the design of better public policies as well as the effective use of limited police resources for crime prevention and reduction.

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