

Chapter 26

The Color of Victimology: An Analysis of Race and Crimes

Kyrie Hernandezpeterson
Hutton and Associates, USA

ABSTRACT

Victims are the center of the criminal justice system. However, negative treatment by any service provider discourages individuals from taking advantage of the services being offered to victims through various organizations in their respective communities. The study of victims (victimology) is informative on the physical, psychological, and emotional effects crimes have on victims. Victim assistance programs and resources have substantially grown over the years in an effort to improve protection to all and assist in pursuing proper justice for victims and those suffering from victimization. The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) and Uniform Crime Report (UCR) are used to gather statistics to further victim research. High profile cases in the media have led to the criminal justice system being deemed biased. Statistics do not substantiate racial discrimination in victimology or in the criminal justice system. There are instances of discrimination in select cases, but as a whole, the criminal justice system should not be viewed as discriminative. The focus should be placed on refining victim assistance programs and being creative in providing the proper resources victims need to receive the justice they deserve and the care and help they need.

INTRODUCTION

The United States of America in the 21st century has found itself in a situation that defies boundaries in regards to wide-spread, violent crime. There is no state, community, or region that is presently safe in terms of the ever-increasing number of crime victims across the country. There are also a growing number of victim assistance programs available which has made it less difficult for victims to report crimes and provided victims with better support and aid. Indeed, there are many different facets to the criminal justice system. One of the most important of these components is the victims themselves. It would be wonderful to live in a world without any victims. Unfortunately, this world is filled with imperfect, selfish humans, many of whom are bent on committing unlawful acts that range from very minor to incredibly

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heinous crimes. Without victims there would be no crime and therefore the criminal justice system would be nonexistent. Even though victims are an extremely important element, they have not always been treated with the proper care or provided with the resources necessary to recover from the life-altering acts perpetrated against them. Within this component there is a controversial sub-component focused on the effects that race plays on victims, victimization, and various types of crime. Intense debates and demonstrations regarding the role that race has in the criminal justice system continue to rage in many parts of the country.

There are different steps that make up the criminal justice system as a whole. The initial step in the criminal justice system is the investigation of a crime. If there is enough evidence that a crime has been committed, an arrest would be the next step. When a suspect is arrested they are taken to jail for booking. Initial appearance, preliminary hearing, arraignment are all stages that come between booking and a trial. If the suspect is found guilty, the final stage in the criminal justice system is sentencing, which is all based on what occurred during the trial. However, the disparities in victimizations focused on race, ethnicity, and gender are usually brought to light during the first and last stages. The arrest and trial are the two most discussed aspects of the criminal justice system, and when minorities are involved in the criminal process, the discussion becomes louder and longer (Department of Government and Justice Studies, 2016).

Throughout history race has unfortunately played a vital and many times unfair role in the victimization process. With the improvement of civil rights for people of all races and ethnicities, there also has been improvement in the process of victimology as it relates to people of various races. Over the years, steps have been taken to ensure that the criminal justice system strives for fairness without bias as it relates to both victims and victimizers. Unfortunately, recent high profile cases have once again magnified the disparities involved in victimization. While studies will show that socioeconomic, geographical factors, and racial factors do play into the extent of victimization; the media is attempting to widen the gap even further regarding the controversy of how minorities are handled in crimes in America. The aim of this chapter is to examine the different types of victims, discuss a brief history of victimology, explore the need for victim assistance, and to consider the effects of race on victimology.

BACKGROUND

Scholars have argued that the criminal justice system is not biased, that the allegation of the criminal justice system being discriminative is a myth (Heather MacDonald, 2008). One scholar, Heather MacDonald, argued that statistics are interpreted in different ways by various experts to enhance their personal views. This means that some data may actually conflict with the reality of what is truly occurring. Whenever race and ethnicity become entangled in the victimization process it becomes more complex, adding controversy to an already difficult situation for all involved. Thus, in the criminal justice system the word “victim” is a widely discussed term. In general, a victim is viewed as an individual against whom some type of crime has been committed. In reality, there are several different subdivisions of the general term “victim”. The first category is known as primary victims. A primary victim is any individual that has been directly affected by any crime that has been committed against him. For example, a female that has been raped would be considered a primary victim (Queensland Government, 2015).

The second subcategory is known as secondary victims. These victims are any person or persons “who is (are) present at the scene of a violent crime and who is (are) injured as a direct result of witnessing that

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