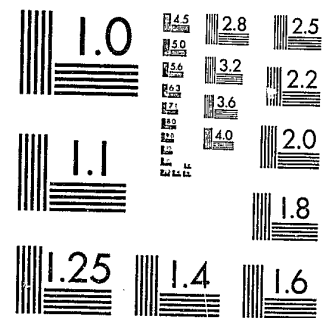


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Victims and Helpers: Reactions to Crime

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Victims and Helpers: Reactions to Crime

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Helen Bischoff
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May 1982

U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

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The most heartfelt thanks goes to the victims who permitted us to intrude on their lives at the worst of times. We were touched by their stories and we also shared some of the warmth they experienced from the concern for crime victims that our research represented. We apologize for the bleakness of a task that generated such comments as, "Why aren't there more elderly robbery victims for us to interview?" Of course, we wish there were no crime victims to interview in the first place. We sincerely hope that this research helps to improve programs serving the needs of crime victims.

Kenneth Friedman
Helen Bischoff
Robert Davis
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SUMMARY

VICTIMS AND HELPERS: REACTIONS TO CRIME

During the last decade, crime has become the metaphor for fear and insecurity. In one way or another, every day each of us is aware of the threat of being a crime victim. Whether it is locking the door or crossing the street to avoid a threatening scene, our sense of potential victimization is always there. The ultimate fear is that we will become like Kitty Genovese, a victim screaming in the night on whom strangers turn their backs. As much experience has shown, the concern that city residents have about who would help them in a crisis is a real one.

This research was carried out to find out who helps and who doesn't, what help is and isn't there after a person becomes the victim of a crime. We wanted to know what the pains of victimization were for the victim of common crimes and where help came from. We wanted to know whether strangers helped and if they did, how it assisted the victim's adjustment. We wanted to know who else helped—friends, neighbors, relatives, official agencies—and what combinations of characteristics of victim, crime, helpers, and neighborhood made for better adjustment after the crime.

The intent of this research was to investigate (a) the problems victims face as a result of the crime, (b) the sources of aid available to crime victims, (c) the extent to which they use informal social supports rather than formal assistance programs, (d) their knowledge of formal assistance programs, and (e) the consequences of their choices for themselves and their supporters, those people giving succor to the victims.

It is hoped that the results of the research will be useful to criminal justice planners and policy makers by providing information that could be used in determining the focus of future victim assistance programs and optimal methods for reaching their client populations. Of particular interest is what the findings tell us about how programs could be designed so as not to be redundant with victims' existing networks of support, how programs could strengthen, rather than supplant, victims' support from neighbors, friends, and kin.

This summary briefly reviews the relevant literature on crime victims, then presents the methods and results of the research and, finally, its policy implications.

Problems Following Victimization

As a result of victimization, people may suffer emotionally, physically, and financially. The crime also may cause practical problems, such as days lost from work or the need for baby sitting. Previous research has indicated that the most common problem victims experience, especially following a violent crime, is psychological disturbance (Zeigenhagen, 1974; Knudten, 1976; Vera Institute of Justice, 1979). If the psychological reaction is extreme, it may produce an emotional crisis, including feelings of helplessness, confusion, anxiety, exhaustion, and physical illness (Halpern, 1973). Bard and Sangrey (1979) theorize that victims are particularly susceptible to feelings of loss of control: they suggest that even if the victim is not harmed or abused, the incident can cause serious psychological trauma because the victim's belief in an orderly and controllable world has been undermined.

Another common psychological reaction to victimization, increased fear of crime, has been found to vary by demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the victim: women, the elderly, minorities, and the poor experience the greatest fear of crime (Davis et al., 1980); Knudten, 1976; Garofalo, 1979). This study examined the problems crime victims experience and the interrelationships among those problems.

Factors Affecting the Coping Process

Among the factors that researchers have identified as affecting the victim's ability to cope with crisis are the extent to which victims blame themselves and the extent to which others blame the victim. Crime victims often blame themselves for the incident (Burgess and Homstrom, 1974; Hursch, 1977; Weiss, 1975). Usually this response has been considered maladaptive, sometimes indicative of a state of depression (Beck, 1967; Bard and Sangrey, 1979). Recently, however, Bulman and Wortman (1977) found that self-blame among paralyzed victims of freak accidents facilitated successful coping. They postulate that under some conditions self-blame is constructive because it provides the victim with a sense of control (Janoff and Bulman, 1979). In addition to self-blame, victims also may be blamed by others. Lerner and Miller (1978) and Walster (1966) believe that as a means of preserving their sense of order in the world, people blame the victim and if victimized, blame themselves. In this research, we explored the issue of blame with the question, "Is there anything you could have done to prevent the crime?" But because we intentionally eliminated the term "blame" from the victim interview, we prefer to talk about "self-responsibility," the sense that the victim feels responsible for the incident.

Agency Support

Information on the proportion of crime victims who contact service agencies for assistance and on the role that these agencies play in helping victims cope is scarce. Knudten, (Knudten, et al., 1977) in a study of crime victims, found that except for physical injuries, most people did not know that help was available from formal organizations and that many who were aware of services did not use them. Literature in related areas suggests that the poor, the minorities, and the least well educated are less likely to seek assistance from agencies because they are often distrusting of formal organizations (Briar, 1976; Carlin, Howard, and Messinger, 1976; Paulsen, 1966). This study investigated the extent to which victims contacted service organizations for assistance and the success victims had in procuring help from these organizations.

Victims' Social Networks and Networks of Support

During the past ten years, the notion of social networks has increasingly been used to help explain how people deal with a wide variety of problems. Social networks have been defined as the set of friends, relatives, and others with whom the victim exchanges material and personal assistance (such as borrowing money or talking about problems). Research indicates that networks provide the main source of assistance in everyday life and emergencies, and that the lack of a supportive network can lead to physiological and psychological pathology (Patterson, 1975; Hammer, Makiesky-Barran and Gutwirth, 1978; Pilisk and Froland, 1978).

We examined both the crime victims' general network and the specific support network for dealing with the crime. The support network included those people who provided assistance as a result of the crime but may or may not have been members of the victim's social network. The size and structure of both social networks and support networks were examined to determine their effects on crime-related problems and psychological adjustment.

The Experiences of Supporters

Crime victims often need psychological and material support from those around them. Ironically, however, at the time when victims most need support, relatives and friends may turn from them because although they want to help, by helping they suffer heightened fear of crime and anxiety themselves (Conklin, 1971; Knudten, 1976). Conklin has referred to these reactions as 'secondary victimization.' We interviewed supporters to find out how they reacted to the crime and to helping the victim.

Methodology

Although recent studies of crime victims have focused on the victim's problems, (Knudten, 1976; Garofalo, 1977; Garofalo and Hindelang, 1977; Burgess and Holmstrom, 1974, 1978) these studies have not interviewed victims shortly after the crime, have not followed the victim longitudinally through the help-seeking process, and none, to our knowledge, have interviewed the people who assisted the victim in dealing with problems resulting from the crime. Additionally, most studies of victims have focused on particularly violent crimes, such as rape and attempted homicide. This study was designed to remedy some of these shortcomings. In order to examine the effects of the most common crimes on victims, this study focused on burglaries, robberies, and assaults. Although the study was conducted in New York City, the neighborhoods, crimes, and victims chosen for study were selected to help ensure that the results could be generalized to other urban areas.

Data for the study was generated from interviews with 274 crime victims, a four month follow-up interview with 182 of the same victims, and 152 interviews with supporters named by the victims. The term "supporter" was defined to include those friends, relatives, and neighbors of the victim and others who rendered either tangible or psychological assistance. The interviews were limited to victims of household burglaries, robberies, and assaults who were 18 years old or older and residents or people who worked or spent a lot of time in the neighborhood. In cases involving multiple victims, interviews were conducted with the first adult victim reached.

The neighborhoods selected for study included a high crime-low income neighborhood or inner city area, a moderate crime, moderate income neighborhood, or middle-class area; and a high crime, mixed income neighborhood or heterogenous area.

The Fordham section of the Bronx was the high crime, low income neighborhood studied. Most of the residents were Black and Hispanic. The average income in Fordham in 1970 was less than one-half the New York City average, and a high percentage of the residents were on welfare. Many of the buildings in the area were abandoned or burnt out and the best maintained dwellings were high-rise public housing projects. Flushing in Queens was the moderate crime, middle income area. Few Flushing residents were on welfare. The average household income in 1970 was above the city average. Most of the residents were White and the housing consisted of single family homes and recently constructed apartment houses. The area was suburban in its general demeanor. Park Slope was the high crime, mixed income area. It included both the poor, who were generally leaving because of rising real estate values, and upwardly mobile middle-class

residents. In 1970, the mean income was below the city average, but not as low as Fordham. The percentage of the residents on welfare was higher than for the city as a whole. Park Slope housing consisted mostly of row houses. Housing conditions varied from block to block, indicative of the transitional state of the area.

The 274 cases studied came from a pool of 1,819 crime (assault, burglary, and robbery) reports in the three neighborhoods. The most common reason (63 percent) for not including a victim from the pool in the sample was our inability to contact him or her by telephone. Other victims (19 percent) were contacted and refused to be interviewed.

The profile of the 274 victims interviewed was as follows: Eight percent were assault victims, 29 percent robbery victims, and 63 percent burglary victims. Ten percent were 65 years old or older. Just over half the sample was White, with the rest evenly split between Blacks and Hispanics. About half the sample made more than \$10,000 per annum, and 40 percent had at least some college education. About two-thirds were married. Because referrals came from police complaint reports, all the victims interviewed reported the crime to and initially had contact with the police.

Sixty-six percent of those interviewed the first time were re-interviewed four months later. The follow-up population did not differ from the initial population on any major variable except race. Slightly more than half the Blacks and Hispanics interviewed completed the follow-up interview compared to three-quarters of the Whites. This did not, however, have a statistically significant effect on the distribution of the follow-up sample on income, education, or neighborhood of residence.

Only 55 percent of victims provided supporter contact information. Those who provided contact information were more likely to be female, but were similar to those who did not provide contact information on all other variables measured.

Major Research Findings

The major findings from the initial interviews, the follow-up interviews, and the supporter interviews, were as follows:

- The most common problems (affecting three-quarters of the sample) from which crime victims suffered, were psychological problems including fear, anxiety, nervousness, self-blame, anger, shame, and difficulty sleeping. (Emotional problems affected victims of property crime (burglary) as well as victims of violent or personal crimes (robbery and assault). Almost all victims reported some type of problem as a result of being victimized.

- Although crime-related problems had declined in severity four months after the incidents, half the victims continued to have problems.
- All but two of the 274 victims in the sample got some help to deal with their problems from friends, relatives, and neighbors. When victims got all the help they needed, they adjusted better, regardless of the number of helpers they had.
- The victim's informal support network—their relatives, friends, and neighbors—were best able to provide emotional support and least able to provide technical and legal assistance. Providing financial assistance to crime victims was particularly burdensome for helpers.
- In providing aid, supporters suffered many of the psychological responses (increased fear and anxiety) that the victims had. Eighty percent of the supporters reported experiencing some form of secondary or indirect victimization.
- Formal assistance agencies had a limited impact on helping crime victims since only one in five victims knew of such agencies. However, three-quarters of those who knew of such agencies went to them for assistance.
- On all measures, victims who were indigent, from ethnic minorities, lived in the inner city, or had limited education, suffered more than other victims: They had more psychological and practical problems as a result of the victimization; problems persisted longer; they were less likely to get all the help they needed; and their helpers were particularly burdened by providing assistance.

Victims' Problems

The impact of the crime of burglaries, assaults, and robberies—was first and foremost psychological. The psychological effects of crime included reports of nervousness, difficulty sleeping, anger, shame, helplessness, and frustration. Victims experienced a decrease in positive feelings such as joy and contentment, and an increase in negative affective states such as depression and guilt. These feelings apparently last several months or longer. Even when describing practical problems stemming from the crime—stolen property, disruption of daily routine, damaged property, medical complications, medical expenses, lost income, problems with employers—three-quarters of the victims described the impact of the crime in psychological terms.

Table I summarizes the problems that crime victims mentioned as resulting from the crime.

TABLE I

VICTIMS' PROBLEMS AS CODED BY RESEARCHERS

	<u>Percentage of Victims With Each Problem (N=274)</u>
Emotional reaction - including nervousness, self-responsibility (self-blame), shame, anger, anxiety, and/or disturbed sleep.	75%
Fear of revictimization at home or on street.	48
Financial problems.	32
Inconvenience in replacing or repairing property.	23
Use and enjoyment of lost object.	14
Sentimental value of lost object.	11
General loss of object.	11

A major emotional response to crime was fear: More than 60 percent of victims reported feeling "very much" or "somewhat" less safe in their homes and more than 40 percent felt less safe in their neighborhoods. After the crime, 60 percent of the 274 victims interviewed reported taking added precautions in their homes and 38 percent said they went out less at night. Twenty-four percent went out less during the day. In response to their increased fear, 16 percent of victims made some effort to organize activities such as tenant patrols or community blockwatching in order to reduce crime in their building or neighborhood. Victims seeking to reduce their vulnerability to future crimes were more likely to be higher socioeconomic status victims (as defined by income, education, neighborhood of residence and employment) and those with larger social networks. Victims who experienced the most problems were those with lower household incomes and less education and those who lived in Fordham, the least affluent neighborhood. Blacks and Hispanics had more problems than Whites. Neither age nor sex was significantly related to the magnitude of reported problems.

The Affect Balance Scale, which consists of four positive mood subscales (joy, contentment, vigor, and affection) and four negative mood subscales (anxiety, depression, guilt, and hostility), was included to measure psychological reaction to the crime. Compared to a sample of college students, crime victims were significantly more anxious, depressed, guilty, and hostile, and less joyful, content, vigorous, and affectionate.

Another component of the psychological reaction to crime was behavioral self-blame, or what we called self-responsibility. Self-responsibility was defined as a way in which an individual can exert control over future events by avoiding the action that is perceived to lead to crime: One out of three members of the sample said that they thought they could have done something to prevent the crime. This group had fewer problems both two weeks and four months after the crime, supporting the theory that self-blame is not maladaptive, but rather helps victims cope with crime. Victims who believed that they could have prevented the crime were likely to have higher personal incomes, have more education, be employed and not live in the inner city or be minority group members than other victims.

In an effort to better understand victims' reactions to crime, we conducted a factor analysis of the victim's responses to crime and defined two types of reactions, a stress response and an instrumental response. Victims whose response was characterized as a stress response suffered more extensive or more serious crime-related problems, greater increase in fear of crime, more severe negative affect, and took more precautions on the street. Women and victims with lower socioeconomic status were more likely than other victims to react with a stress response. The instrumental response was characteristic of the victims who believed that they could have avoided the crime, who took more precautions inside the home, and who tried to organize neighbors to fight crime. Victims with larger social networks, higher socioeconomic status, and younger victims were more likely to react with an instrumental response.

For victims of burglary, robbery, and assault, the world is a less safe place to live. Whether or not the crime involved personal contact between the victim and the offender, for the victim it was still a crime against the person. The psychological impact of crime appeared to be acute because there was often little that victims could do to right the wrong or to ensure that it would not happen again. To be sure, some victims tried to organize their neighbors to take steps to insure their safety. But more common were feelings of helplessness or resignation, especially among poor victims who were least able to limit their continued vulnerability.

Help in Coping with Victimization

Victims sought many different forms of assistance. Some people needed a ride to one place or another; some needed an escort to go out or to go to court; some needed repairs made to a door or to items damaged during the commission of the crime; some people needed legal advice or counseling. The services victims needed varied and no single type of help was desired by a majority of victims. The most common form of help needed—lock repair—was mentioned by 40 percent of the victims. Despite emotional distress, few victims expressed a need for counseling. Victims needed and received the following types of assistance:

TABLE II
PERCENTAGE OF VICTIMS NEEDING HELP
AND RECEIVING HELP ON EACH ITEM
(Ordered by Frequency of Need)

Needs	Percent Requesting Specific Type of Help at Initial Interview	Percent Receiving Help of Those Who Requested Help at Initial Interview
Install locks	39%	73%
Borrow money	27	67
Stay with victim	21	70
Ride somewhere	18	86
Watch home	17	63
Help getting to doctor or hospital	11	87
Place to stay	11	61
Help shopping	11	90
Legal assistance	11	34
Escort	10	79
Counseling	9	31
Babysitting	8	82

Overall, about 30 percent of victims needs were unfulfilled. Victims from low socioeconomic groups were less likely than other victims to receive the help they needed.

One of the first persons many victims came in contact with after the crime was a police officer and the officers usually lent assistance to victims. Two in five victims reported that the police had lent significant assistance, and one in five reported that the police "went out of their way" to help.

Most of the support crime victims received came from other individuals—friends, relatives, neighbors, co-workers, and a few strangers. One of the most surprising, and happiest, findings of the study was that virtually all the victims in the sample received support from other people: All but two of the 274 victims received help and they averaged 4 supporters each. This was true in spite of the fact that many victims lived alone.

Most supporters were contacted within two days of the incident and were people the victim saw often and knew for a long time. More than half the supporters lived in the same neighborhood and close to 80 percent lived in the same borough as the victim. About two-thirds of victims' supporters were also members of victims' social networks, the people the victim usually turned to for assistance. Among the members of the support network people who helped with the crime-related problems, who were not members of the social network were neighbors, landlords, and superintendents. Landlords, however, were most often named by victims as those who could not or would not help.

TABLE III

SUPPORTER CHARACTERISTICS

First contact between victim and supporter (n=1040)	
First day	61%
After first day	39
	100%
How contact occurred (n=1039)	
Initiated by victim	53%
Supporter there when crime occurred or discovered	17
Supporter contacted victim	10
Other	20
	100%
Supporter's relationship to victim (n=1108)	
Relative	42%
Friend	32
Neighbor	16
Landlord/Superintendent	3
Stranger	2
Other	5
	100%

(Continued next page)

SUPPORTER CHARACTERISTICS

(Continued from previous page)

Where supporter lived (n=1081)	
Same neighborhood	57%
Same borough	22
Outside borough	21
	100%
Frequency of contact before crime (n=1074)	
Once a week or more	81%
Once a month or more	14
Less than once a month	3
Never (stranger)	2
	100%
Length of Acquaintance (n=1066)	
More than 5 years	64%
1 to 5 years	22
Less than 1 year	12
Strangers	2
	100%
Supporter was network member (n=1063)	
Yes	61%
No	39
	100%

Victims received the most support from people they were close to—relatives, friends, and social network members. But neighbors and non-network individuals were as likely to stay with the victim as were supporters with closer ties, and surprisingly, neighbors and even landlords were among the people who lent money to victims. Supporters who belonged to the victim's pre-existing social network, however, were the most likely to provide financial assistance. Table IV summarizes the type of people and type of help provided to crime victims.

TABLE IV

PERCENT OF RELATIVES, FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS AND LANDLORD/SUPERINTENDENTS WHO WERE SUPPORTERS WHO PROVIDED EACH TYPE OF ASSISTANCE

Relationship	Emotional Support	Financial Support	Stayed With Victim
Relatives (n=465)	77%	15%	9%
Friends (355)	79	14	6
Neighbors (177)	60	11	6
Landlord/Superintendents (33)	33	17	0

(Continued next page)

TABLE IV
(Continued from previous page)

Relationship	Repairs	Practical Services (Transportation, baby sitting, help shopping)	Long-term Assistance (Any aid still being received at time of follow-up)
Relative	5%	19%	51%
Friend	4	16	49
Neighbor	5	16	40
Landlord/Super.	58	3	27

The strong local nature of support demonstrated by the high frequency of neighbors in the support network compared to the social network, suggests that physical proximity was an important attribute of people who helped the victim of a crime. This strong neighborhood support may have reflected the common interests of neighbors in dealing with crime.

There were well defined differences between the services people were and were not able to get from other individuals: Almost 80 percent of supporters provided help in the form of talk (as well as other types of assistance) and it appeared that in-person, rather than telephone contact, was important. Victims received from other people the types of services that required time but few special skills, such as baby sitting and help with shopping. The services that victims most often reported that they failed to receive from their informal network were legal advice and psychological counseling—both professional services. Other services that victims failed to receive from other individuals included temporary shelter, financial assistance, and lock repair.

Only 15 percent of the victims in the sample sought assistance from service agencies. Failure to contact agencies usually stemmed from lack of awareness of their existence. When victims were asked if they knew of any agency that could provide support, only 19 percent responded affirmatively.

Victims who sought assistance from formal organizations looked to a variety of agencies. Five percent sought help from public assistance, and two percent from the Housing Authority. Other agencies mentioned by one or two victims included: Social Security, senior citizen groups, the Victim Services Agency, and the New York State Crime Victim's Compensation Board.

The majority of victims reported prior experience with the agencies they contacted, particularly public assistance and Social Security recipients. Low income victims and victims who reported the most needs were the most likely to approach formal organizations for help.

Victims requested the following types of help from organizations: Replacement of stolen benefit checks, food stamps, and other forms of financial assistance; help with repairs; information on insurance; relocation assistance; and help from housing agencies to pressure landlords to make repairs. Just over half the victims who sought agency assistance received the help they requested. Victims were more likely to receive help with repairs, applications for Federal Crime Insurance and counseling than to obtain financial and relocation assistance. Victims who could not obtain the financial assistance they needed usually were those who wanted welfare to reissue stolen checks or food stamps.

Victims who were least successful in getting their needs met either through informal or formal sources were victims with weak neighborhood network ties; victims belonging to lower socioeconomic groups, victims who reported serious crime-related problems, and victims with smaller social networks.

Readjustment After Victimization

Substantial adjustment occurred among victims during the four months between the crime and the administration of the follow-up interview. Still, many victims continued to report crime-related problems (30 percent still needed a lock repaired; 17 percent still owed money, 11 percent still needed someone to stay with them), fear of crime, and continued extra precautions (98 percent). Victims belonging to lower socioeconomic groups more frequently reported residual problems and heightened fear of crime than other victims responding to the follow-up interview. Thus, contrary to the suggestions of some writers, the greater hardships generally experienced by less affluent citizens apparently had not immunized them against the trauma of victimization; in fact, they had more difficulty coping.

Assistance from helpers benefited victims in coping with the aftermath of crime. Specifically: victims who received all the help they reported needing on the initial interview reported significantly fewer crime-related problems on the follow-up interview than victims who failed to get one or more types of needed assistance; victims who had three or more supporters reported significantly less fear of crime on the follow-up interview than victims with two or fewer supporters; and, victims with more supporters, victims who felt the police had been sympathetic, and victims who got all the assistance they needed felt more positively about other people at the time of the follow-up interview than other victims.

Of the responses to victimization measured in the study, taking of precautions endured the longest, showing little change over time. This finding is in curious contrast to the finding that the fear of crime that followed victimization did abate over time. The persistence of taking of precautions generated by the experience of victimization even after the victims apparently recovered from the crime suggests that the effect may be cumulative. Each time a person is victimized (or learns that an acquaintance is victimized), new precautions are added to a list of precautions the victim already engages in.

Taking added precautions may have reduced victims' vulnerability to crime and also may have helped victims to regain a sense of control over their environments. However, one may speculate that the logical conclusion of such a process is a society in which residences turn into armed fortresses from which people are reluctant to venture out. Such a scenario is reinforced by the fact that a third of the sample reported a worsening of relationships with other people and/or increased suspicion of people as a result of victimization. This finding, however, was puzzling in view of the finding that half of the sample felt more optimistic about peoples' willingness to help as a result of the experience.

The Effects of Providing Help on Supporters

Friends, relatives, and neighbors suffer hidden costs of helping victims: 80 percent of supporters reported experiencing some form of secondary victimization. For some supporters, this meant feeling nervous or frightened, in others, increased suspicion of people, and in others, feeling less safe at home or on the street. These reactions were more common among supporters who lived in the same neighborhood than those who lived elsewhere and among those who felt close to the victim or were relatives than those who did not feel close to the victim.

Nearly half of the supporters reported feeling uncomfortable when talking to the victim about the crime. In most cases, this stemmed from the supporters' increased feeling of vulnerability. But the discomfort also reflected the level of distress of the victim. Supporters of victims with more problems and greater fear of crime and victims who supporters thought were depressed, upset, or talked too much expressed more discomfort than others. Supporters of low socioeconomic status victims experienced greater discomfort than others, apparently because they felt imposed upon by requests for money. Since they had low incomes themselves, the financial burden was falling on those who could least afford it.

Approximately one-quarter of supporters believed that the victim "could have been a little more careful." This percentage should be compared to the 40 percent of victims who thought they, the victims, could have exercised more care. Victims with lower socioeconomic status blamed themselves less often than others, but supporters of victims with lower socioeconomic status blamed victims more than did supporters of victims of higher socioeconomic status.

The evidence from supporter interviews was that the effects of crime do not end with the victim. Yet, most supporters did not regret that the victim had turned to them for assistance: One-fifth of the supporters reported they were brought closer to the victim by the experience, and indeed, only two supporters stated that their relationship with the victim was jeopardized because of the incident. Nine in ten supporters viewed their contribution to the victim as important. And the overwhelming majority (97 percent) of supporters did not wish that the victim had gone elsewhere for help.

Programmatic Implications of the Study

In his study of Milwaukee crime victims, Knudten (1976) suggested that extensive victim programs were not needed by most victims. Rather, greater coordination of existing community services could adequately service crime victims. While the data from the study do confirm that many victims have limited, simple needs—getting a ride somewhere, help with shopping, someone to stay with or comfort them—and are successful in receiving assistance with those needs from other individuals, the data also suggest that for certain needs and certain victims, there is an appropriate role for victim service programs.

Based on this research of informal supports, we believe that victim service programs have several important non-duplicative functions to perform. First, the data strongly indicate that victims from lower socioeconomic groups experience the most serious hardship as a result of crime and are not always successful in getting the assistance they need from other individuals or from the social service agencies with which they have ongoing relationships. These victims clearly need some form of organized assistance to help them cope with the aftermath of victimization.

Second, there are several kinds of assistance that victims often fail to receive from their informal supports or from social service agencies not designed specifically to serve victims. These include crisis counseling, legal assistance, lock repair, emergency financial aid, and temporary shelter. Some of these forms of assistance, particularly crisis counseling and legal assistance, require professional training to administer and victims could not normally get these kinds of help from their social networks. Moreover, some of these forms of assistance, particularly

legal assistance and lock repair, are so specific to crime victims that social service organizations created for other purposes could not reasonably be expected to provide them. Programs specifically tailored to the needs of victims are thus useful, and perhaps essential to provide aid that victims cannot readily obtain from other sources.

A third role for victim programs suggested by the data is in placing victims in touch with organizations that can help them. Data from both Knudten's study and this one indicated that many victims do not know that they can get assistance from service organizations and government agencies for crime-related problems. Knudten implicitly concludes that the solution to this problem lies in public education efforts. The data from this study are silent on the value of public education, however, the Victim Services Agency's experience with outreach suggests that if a person has not been a crime victim, public announcements about victim services are unconsciously avoided because they seem to make people uncomfortable much as talking to a victim about the crime made supporters uncomfortable. A better approach may be to make sure that if people become victims, they are informed about assistance programs. This goal could be achieved by the police telling victims about such programs (orally, or by giving out cards), or by programs routinely contacting victims who have reported crimes. (Both of these approaches would limit outreach to victims who have reported crimes to the police.) Once program staff had ascertained the victim's needs, a decision could be made about whether the victim ought to be encouraged to rely on their informal support network for help, whether the victim had a specialized need best provided by the program, or whether the victim should be referred to another service organization for assistance.

Another role for victim programs suggested by the research would be to develop ways to help supporters in their efforts to help victims. Interviews with those helpers who provided assistance to victims showed that supporters suffer many of the same aftereffects of victimization as the victim—increased fear of crime, increased suspicion about other people and general anxiety. If victim programs could give advice and emotional support to potential helpers to prepare them for helping victims, it would benefit both victims and supporters and perhaps partially contain the ripple effect of crime. Supporter programs might involve education about the impact of crime on its victims, as well as the impact that helping has on the helper, tips on providing psychological first aid to crime victims, mutual support groups, and suggestions for community and individual crime prevention activities. Engaging in anti-crime activities could help both victim and supporter develop a sense of control over their environment by introducing ways to reduce vulnerability to crime.

To summarize, many victims' needs can be met without the intervention of victim assistance programs. However, this study suggests that victim programs are essential for disadvantaged victims who are not as successful as others in finding help with their problems, for certain types of assistance that other service organizations cannot easily provide, and helping those supporters who want to help the victims. If, as this study indicated, 30 percent of victims do not get all the help they need, the potential client population each year in New York City is well over 300,000 people.

On the assumption that victim assistance programs are needed, how ought such programs be organized? The data from this study strongly suggest that programs be comprehensive and locally based.

The arguments for the development of comprehensive programs emerge from the findings that victims of the three types of crime studied - burglary, robbery, and assault - had similar responses and similar needs resulting from the crimes. In addition, women and elderly - two groups of crime victims for whom special programs have been developed - did not appear to have qualitatively different types of needs than men or non-elderly victims. Both groups were as successful as other victims in receiving the help they needed. They were not more likely to use formal agencies and they showed no distinctive patterns of adjustment over time. Measures of difficulty that decreased over time for the entire sample decreased for women and the elderly as well. These findings are in agreement with those of Knudten who argues that the development of programs oriented to one particular age, sex, or racial group may actually undermine the potential value of the service offered. Not all men or women experiencing a particular crime share the same degree of seriousness of the crime event or have the same response although many elderly now believe they are being increasingly victimized, the data do not support this contention (1976:10).

Programs that are comprehensive in terms of the types of victims they serve and the types of crimes they respond to would appear to have advantages over programs targeted for one type of victim or one type of crime. Among the advantages would be a capacity, because of the larger volume, to offer a wider range of services, greater economies in service delivery, and better potential for stable funding because of a broader constituency. (During the last decade, at different times funding has been more plentiful for certain types of victims than others.) If staffing permitted, it would be desirable within a comprehensive program to have specialists who would be sensitive to special techniques of outreach and the particular needs of certain types of crime victims.

While the data did not strongly support the need to target programs for specific types of crimes or victims it did indicate that a disproportionate share of the problems resulting from victimization is borne by the poor. Moreover, the poor were less successful than other victims in getting the help they needed. This suggests the need for special efforts to reach out to these victims. Because the poor are often segregated geographically, an effective way to reach them may be through easily accessible, local satellite offices of an urban victim program, such as the Fordham area we studied in New York.

Such storefront offices would permit outreach efforts (letters or phone calls) with those victims most seriously affected by crime and most in danger of subsequent victimization. Neighborhood offices in selected areas would have other advantages as well. Local offices could more easily offer aid to supporters and build on local services through churches, senior citizen centers, block associations, and other community groups to provide assistance for victims. These local groups could be aided in sponsoring programs to educate people about how to reduce their vulnerability to crime, and organize collective anti-crime efforts (such as citizen patrols, block watching, and persuading landlords to improve security). These decentralized adjuncts to victim programs might cost more than a single central office, but would increase the ability of programs to target services to the most needy. With local offices capable of providing a broad range of services or directing victims to appropriate agencies, crime victims would be better served.

Issues for Further Research

Our research project was intended to be exploratory in nature, providing tentative answers to some questions, but also raising new issues. In retrospect, the data were surprisingly unequivocal on some issues—the important role that support from others plays for nearly all victims and the particular need of the poor for programs to supplement the support they are able to obtain on their own. Still, there are a number of issues raised by the study which merit further exploration.

First, we need to know more about the long-term impact of victimization. Do some victims of assault, robbery, and burglary continue to experience depression, frustration, fear, and have difficulty functioning long after the crime, as seems to be true of rape victims? If so, can such victims be identified early, and helped? Second, we need to understand more about the meaning of precautions victims take after a crime. It is puzzling that our data showed no evidence that elderly victims were more likely to initiate new precautions after the crime than other victims.

Third, we need to better understand the effects of crime on victims' perception of their neighborhood. Does victimization often weaken the victims' ties to their neighborhoods or lessen their use of neighborhood facilities? How many victims relocate because of their experience? What do the answers to these questions imply for the continuation of healthy urban neighborhoods? Fourth, how important an influence is the police officer to the victim's adjustment, and how can officers best help victims cope with the aftermath of crime? Fifth, while we argue that counseling is a service that programs ought to provide to victims, there are no data we are aware of that speak to what kind of counseling is most effective for victims, or even whether counseling helps at all. We should know more about what models of counseling (such as crisis counseling, peer counseling, family counseling, or group counseling) are appropriate, and about the kinds of situations in which each is most effective. Sixth, the question whether certain forms of self-blame by the victim (i.e., feeling that victimization might have been avoided had certain actions been taken) are constructive deserves greater exploration. Seventh, and lastly, we need to obtain better normative data on measures of psychological adjustment from non-victim populations. Normative data on selected samples of non-victims would enable us to determine much more about the length of the adjustment process and about the adjustment of one group of victims versus another.

Searching for a broad perspective from which to view the results of this study, we find ourselves turning to the data that most surprised us. On the side of disturbing and disheartening, we were stunned at the general impact of a crime on the victim's psychological state and at the alterations in daily life that were so often a part of the post-victimization experience. In response to burglaries, parents who worked suddenly rearranged their lives so that the children would not be home alone after school. Young and old, male and female victims stayed home at night for fear of the streets. Many victims expressed the desire to uproot their lives and move to what they perceived as a safer area. This side of the response to criminal victimization was difficult.

But there is another side to this research, one that is comforting and cause for optimism. It comes from the help that was offered crime victims by friends, relatives, neighbors, and strangers. Many of the victims we spoke to discovered care and comfort from unexpected people. The elderly found neighbors delivering meals to their doorstep and calling regularly to check on them. Young victims who lived alone discovered people at work to talk to and previously unnoticed neighbors. Those who got help where they expected to were also thankful and recognized the caring that surrounded them.

There seems little point to weighing the balance between these two sides of the research findings. Both exist and as the program suggestions indicate, we believe victim service programs should take both aspects into account in an effort to help victims cope with crime while contributing to the caring and supportive side of human nature.

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