



# The Secondary Victimization of Crime Victims: The Impact of Seeking Justice in the Criminal Justice System



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# Agenda

- Today, our agenda will focus on the following topics:
  1. Defining secondary victimization.
  2. Points of contact that result in secondary victimization.
  3. Impact of secondary victimization on crime victims.
  4. Impact of secondary victimization on the criminal justice system.
  5. Recommendations to reduce secondary victimization.



# Introduction

- As a criminal justice professional, what different interactions do you have with suspects and offenders?
- We know that criminal justice professionals possess certain responsibilities and goals that have to be accomplished.
- We cannot forget about our crime victims.
  - They can be anyone we know.
  - The trauma crime victims go through can be great-depending upon many factors.



# Victims


- Crime victims go through many emotions in being victimized by a criminal event.
- This can depend upon many factors:
  - The criminal event
  - The individual
  - The individual's background
- Response to victimization can take many forms.
  - There is no single emotion "common" to victimization.

# Trauma

- Depending upon the crime, victims can through many things, to include physical and emotional harm.
- Some victims may be able to recount experiences well.
- Other victims may not be able to recount events.
- There are other victims who may remember bits and pieces of the event.
  - Defense mechanisms such as repression can impact recall.
  - Stories can change. While this can be an indicator of issues, such as a false report, it can be a result of the trauma response.



# Trauma Response

- When an individual goes through trauma, both physical and emotional responses can occur.
- The brain, hormones, and the central nervous system can be impacted by trauma (such as from crime).
- Psychologically, the individual may not be able to handle their victimization.
  - A variety of defense mechanisms can occur (beyond repression). Other examples of defense mechanisms include:
    - Regression, denial, and suppression are examples. 
- **The mind is complex**

# Emotional Response to Trauma

- Humans can exhibit different types of emotions when a trauma occurs:
  - Shock and denial
  - Anger and acting out
  - Confusion
  - Fear
  - Sadness
  - Numbness
  - Self-blame
  - Even laughter has been seen with some victims

# Physical Consequences to Trauma

- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Insomnia
- Physical pains
- Being startled easy
- Lack of concentration
- Agitation
- Tiredness
- Nightmares





# Importance

- Every criminal justice professional will come into contact with victims and their families.
- When a victim comes to law enforcement (for example), victims take the chance in reporting their crime.
- Depending upon the crime, reporting can be a frightening experience for the victim.
- Some victims have no familial or other social support.
- Some victims are already blaming themselves.
- They come to us, the criminal justice professional, in an attempt to seek justice.

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# Secondary Victimization

- Secondary victimization refers to the re-victimization of crime victims during their interactions with criminal justice professionals, medical personnel (such as SANE-nurses), psychological staff, and victim advocates.
- When we look at this, all of these “helping individuals” are (in their own way) trying to help victims.
- In different ways, even ways that appear to be helping, they can unintentionally revictimize the victim.

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# SANE-Nurses

- Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners are registered nurses that form rape exams for sexual assault victims.
- Rape kits are important. They are important for both the criminal justice system and for the victim.
- These can be traumatizing for rape victims.
- In attempting to collect physical evidence, SANE-Nurses can unintentionally revictimize rape victims.

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# The Criminal Justice System

- The criminal justice system possesses certain goals.
- The ideal of these goals is to ensure the smooth functioning of the system, itself.
- These goals can conflict with victims and their ideals of what justice is.
  - This can be impacted by a variety of factors.
    - Experiences
    - Media



# Law Enforcement

- Law enforcement possess a variety of job functions throughout their day.
  - Responding to calls for service
  - Investigation
  - Arrest
- It is during the “response” and “investigation” function where issues can occur.
  - Interviewing crime victims is an important part of case work.
  - It is important to know what the victim has gone through, where it happened, how it happened, and who did it.
  - During the interview phase, revictimization can occur.
  - It can occur, also, during an potential follow-up investigations.



# Courts

- The role of our courts is to determine guilt vs. innocence.
- The court operates in a specific manner according to criminal procedure.
- The court process can revictimize crime victims during the following:
  - Interviews and having to go through multiple interviews.
  - Plea bargaining and pre-trial diversion.
  - Postponements and continuances.
  - Testifying and having to re-testify.
  - Decisions made by juries and/or the judge.
  - Victim impact statements.



# Helping Professionals

- There are a variety of helping professionals who seek to help crime victims recover and/or reconcile.
- Victim advocacy and psychology/psychiatry
  - Victim advocates can unintentionally revictimize crime victims.
    - An example of this occurs when victim advocates (who have experienced past victimization) express their victimization to crime victims.
  - Not every psychologist/psychiatrist is prepared to handle the complexity of PTSD and the resulting trauma response.
    - Psychologists can specialize in certain areas.
    - If a helping individual is not trained in trauma response and what that does to a victim, it can revictimize them.



# Study

- Published a study (dissertation) on this topic:
  - *The Complex Impact of Secondary Victimization on Rape Victims.*
- In this study, I wanted to explore the complexity of secondary victimization and how it can impact the crime victim (in this case, rape victims).
- I studied this phenomena through interviewing victim advocates, utilizing a Delphi Method.
  - While common used for nursing research, I chose the Delphi Method to gain knowledge and narratives on the victim experience.





# Findings

- Approximately 87% of participants found that the criminal justice system secondarily victimizes rape victims (in general).
- Victims do not report rape because they are afraid of the treatment they will receive in going through the criminal justice system.
- 40% of the participants argued that secondary victimization exists in the law enforcement “branch” of criminal justice.
- 40% of the participants argued that medical personnel secondarily victimize rape victims.

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- 76% of the participants argued that secondary victimization occurs within our courts.
- 33% of the participants argued that those close to a victim secondarily victimize them.

# The “How” of Secondary Victimization

- We are all human. We were raised a certain way.
- We grew up. We experienced life.
- In some ways, these experiences can bias us, intentionally or unintentionally.
- Our bias can impact our interactions with crime victims.
- Participants in the study relayed that biases are impacting criminal justice and helping individual's interactions with crime victims.



- Continued education and training are key to improving interactions with crime victims, regardless of the crime.
- Collaboration among victim advocacy groups and the criminal justice system.
- Effective communication among all individuals who deal with crime victims and their families.
- Flyers and informational booklets (resources).
- Active listening to what the crime victim is saying.
- Awareness of the different trauma responses. A victim can laugh, cry, or freeze when being interviewed.

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# Impact of Secondary Victimization of Crime Victims

- Secondary victimization does not exist in a microcosm.
- What victims go through can impact how criminal justice professionals (and helping professionals) do their job.
- It can add time to interviews, investigations, the court process, and to daily work.



# Importance: In Conclusion

- How one person deals with victimization will not be representative of how all victims deal with victimization.
- As professionals, we have to remember that victims come to us.
  - They may come to us for help.
  - They may come to us for justice.
  
  - What one victim needs will be markedly different than others.
  - For instance, some may want to be actively involved in the justice process; while others do not.
  
  - When we look at crime victimization, anyone can be a victim. It can be anyone we know, have known, and will know.

Thank you for your time  
today!



What questions do you have?

