

Victimology from a police perspective

Dr. Kathy Carson,, Former Policy, Research, and Training Officer, Billings Police Department, City of Billings, Montana, U.S.A.

Citation: Carson K. Victimology from a police perspective. *Int J Eth Trauma Victimology* 2015; 1(1):33-36.

Article history

Received: Aug 25, 2014
Received in revised form: Nov 14, 2014
Accepted: Nov 25, 2014
Available online: January 11, 2015

Corresponding author

Dr. Kathy Carson

Former Policy, Research, and Training Officer, Billings Police Department, City of Billings, Montana, U.S.A.

Phone: +1 (406) 697-5078
Email: carsonk@aol.com

Abstract

Victimology is the study of the victims of crime. This paper studies Victimology from a former police officer's point of view using criminology. Crimes are broken down by intent versus non-intent by categorizing the type of crime the victim encounters. These type of crimes discussed include crimes of passion, crimes of occurrence, and crimes of accidents. Crimes of passion involve heavy emotion outweighing logic and reasoning. Crimes of occurrence are crimes that involve victims being in the right place at the right time. Victims of crimes of occurrence do not specifically know the suspect. Finally, crimes of accidents include victims unintentionally being injured or killed unintentionally and by accident.

Keywords: Crimes of passion, occurrence, accidents, victimology.

2015 IJETV. All rights reserved

Introduction

Much research has been done in America to determine if certain people or circumstances help predict if he or she will become a victim or not. The answer is yes in some cases certain people like prostitutes, mentally diminished, disabled, children, young, gender, or elderly persons become victims of crime at a higher rate. According to Lewis and Maxfield (1980), certain people have higher incidents of Victimology based on the neighborhoods social conditions¹.

However, circumstances certainly play a part of the crime Victimology too. Circumstances include time of day, location, type of crime, type of weapon used, availability of witnesses, lighting, group or individual activity, and in the life of the suspect and victim etc.². Circumstances contribute to the extent of violence of a crime to the victim. Violent crimes occur in most cities and often involve random victims.

As a police officer in the middle size city of Billings, Montana in the United States, I responded to crimes of passion, crimes of circumstances, and crimes of accidents. Crimes of passion often involved intimate partners both from heterosexual and homosexual

partners as well as with immediate family members and shirt tail relatives. Victims involved children, adults, mentally ill, disabled, elderly, destitute, and affluent.

The following paragraphs cover crimes of passion, crimes of circumstance, and crimes of accidents. I provide an example publicized by the media as well as a person experience from years working on the street as a police officer. As evident, this is not an absolute description of Victimology but rather a street perspective from a former law enforcement officer.

Discussion

Victimology is a topic that has been covered extensively by criminologists for years. One main theme with Victimology is that people become victims of crime every second of every day in every continent across the world. One main idea to remember is that the victim is never responsible for becoming a victim of a crime.

Yes, certain occupations or predicaments contribute to a higher rate of crimes against a particular group of people, but the group or individual is not responsible for the crime. Victims do not deserve

the acts of violence nor crimes against them because someone else views him or her with judging eyes. Therefore, it is inherent those who study Victimology understand the types of crime to better prosecute offenders and further develop legislation for the prosecution of crimes.

Crimes of Passion

Crimes of passion occur as a result of an imbalance between logic and emotions. Crimes of passion do not mitigate the responsibility, but rather establish a meaning behind the crime. Emotion is the key distracter that psychologically distorts the trigger and often results in crimes of violence.

A famous crime of passion that comes to mind is the O.J. Simpson murders of Nicole Simpson and Ronald Goldman. If one were to read the actual court transcripts from both the criminal and civil trial evidence would clearly illustrate the suspect actions leading up to the murder. The transcripts clearly show a jealous husband catching his estranged wife with another man³. Crimes of passion in domestic violence situations show stalking behavior, jealous behavior, verbal or written threats, followed up by violent actions.

I worked a case where the wife was the breadwinner of the family. When the divorce was signed by the court, the house was awarded to the wife. The ex-husband had a sense of entitlement to the property. The ex-husband had controlling issues and did not like that his ex-wife had moved out of the city to an unknown location. The ex-husband called all the friends, sent threatening letters to family members, showed up at the usual locations, and kept trying to locate the wife.

When it came time for the wife to move personal property out of the residence, the ex-husband showed up and sliced the tires of the prospective buyer and the brother's vehicle immobilizing the two vehicles. The ex-husband then drank enough alcohol before returning to the residence and shooting the brother through a window. The ex-husband shot at the wife but missed and was apprehended after a short police pursuit and prosecuted. Next, is a description of crimes of circumstance.

Crimes of Circumstance

Crimes of circumstance are crimes that occur when people are in the right place at the right time for the crime to occur. These types of crimes catch the

victim off guard. There is a sense of misunderstanding as well as shock that the victim feels. The victim feels if only I would not have gone to the store, to the bank, to the movie, to a place where the crime occurred. The victims' "what if" themselves and their actions often wondering "why me"?

One famous case that comes to mind is the case of the Aurora Colorado movie theater shooting⁴. Who would think that just going to the opening of the movie "The Dark Knight Rising" would change his or her life and the life of others? Murderer James Holmes chose to randomly kill 12 innocent people just because of their enthusiasm for a movie. Crimes of occurrence occur nearly every second of every day across the world.

I once worked a case that a middle-age mentally diminished woman living in a nursing home. She was unable to care for herself, so her parents put her in a nursing home. She decided to get cat food for her cat at around 0230am hours one fall night. She walked to the grocery store just two blocks away then returned home. She was asleep when the suspect broke into her apartment through a window, held her a knife point, and raped her. The suspect was caught and prosecuted, but the trauma left the already mentally diminished woman a prisoner of her own apartment.

Crimes of occurrence can cripple the victim with a hyper sense of being scared, paranoid, and trapped. Crimes of occurrence can make the victim unable to move on because the victim is stuck in a loop of remembering the act of violence over and over again. A sense of hopelessness prevails when the suspect is not caught or prosecuted. Next, a brief description of crimes of accident follows.

Crimes of Accident

This type of crime involves unintended accidents in which a person becomes a victim of a crime. Examples of crimes of accident are traffic accidents where persons are injured or killed, unintentional actions that are criminal, and any other crime that lacks intent.

Sometimes accidents happen. For instance, a young person races a car with another person for the fun of competition, but crashes from inexperience driving. The intent was to have fun with the friends who are

encouraging him or her to race. However, the ignorance of the Newton's laws of motion that states for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction⁵. Another example of a crime of accident may be when a family goes boating on the river, the boat capsizes, and a child drowns. The victim is in the right place at the right time for the crime to occur.

One highly publicized crime of accident involved Princess Diana⁶. She was in a chauffeur driven car as a passenger being chased by paparazzi for photographs. She died in a car crash, which I may add was a legionary loss not just for England but for the world.

One case that I worked involved a healthy baby being born to two mentally challenged parents. The baby caught a cold, so the parents took the baby to the doctor. The doctor suggested to the parents to take the baby home and to place the baby in the bathroom. The parents were instructed to turn on the hot water from the shower with the door closed to create a humidifier effect so that the baby could breathe a little better. The parents understood the instructions literally but without common sense. The parents took the baby and put the baby in a bassinette and placed the baby under the hot shower water. Consequently, the baby died but the mentally challenged parents were not charged.

Crimes of accidents occur when a series of actions cause an unintended reaction. The specific intent to conduct a crime is not part of the modus operandi. Some would argue that a suspect's actions always cause intent, but at times a bad decision that was made at a split second occurs. To this extent I must offer a disclaimer as follows.

Disclaimer

One must clearly understand that the majority of crimes involve alcohol and or drugs in America. Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs is not a defense for one's actions. Rather just the opposite. Being under the influence can be deemed a mitigating circumstance thus enhancing the punishment. For the most part people clearly know when he or she is under the influence and that the decision-making process is affected, but often people use this liquid courage to proceed against the odds.

Statistically, when people are under the influence of alcohol or drugs the chances of committing a crime go up drastically. Offenses range from minor to major and change not only the offender's life but the life of everyone involved. Living victims replay the crimes over and over, while when sober the offender has to live with the knowing that he or she injured or killed someone. The summary on this brief Victimology description from a former police officer follows.

Conclusion

Victimology may be described in a variety of ways with a plethora of adjectives, but I narrow it down to crimes of passion, crimes of circumstance, and crimes of accident. Crimes of passion involve emotion taking over logic and reasoning. Crimes of passion always involve the suspect knowing the victim. Crimes of passion often show fits of rage by the sheer violence of the encounter.

Crimes of circumstance are the crimes that involve non-target persons. The victim is picked by chance rather than on purpose. Crimes of circumstance often involve strangers. Crimes of circumstance involve innocent people that are simply in the path of the storm.

Finally, crimes of accidents can involve known victims and unknown victims. Crimes of accidents occur because the suspect makes some bad decision or decisions that set off a chain reaction that leads to a violent unintended end. Like crimes of circumstance, crimes of accidents also play a toll on the victim because the victim often replays the crime in his or her head wondering "why me."

The final ingredient in determining Victimology is intent. The intent of the crime helps distinguish if the victim was targeted purposefully or targeted just by chance of circumstance. Intent is determined by prosecution whereas non-intent is determined by the defense. If the crime occurred by chance, then the sentencing phase for the suspect will be reduced. This interpretation is a view of Victimology from one former police officer's perspective.

Conflict of interest

None declared

References

1. Dan A. Lewis MGM. Fear in the Neighborhoods: an Investigation of the Impact of Crime. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 1980; 17(2):160-189.
2. Marshall JHDWOIH. Criminal Careers in the Short-Term: Intra-Individual Variability in Crime and Its Relation to Local Life Circumstances. *American Sociological Review*. 1995;60(5):655-673.
3. Janney RW. The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth. Linguistic Avoidance. In: Simpson OJ, ed. *Words, Lexemes, Concepts – Approaches to the lexicon. Studies in Honour of Leonhard Lipka*,. Tübingen: Narr, S.: W. Falkner & H.-J. Schmid; 1999:259-272.
4. Barry EEMDWL. Effects of News Media Messages about Mass Shootings on Attitudes toward Persons with Serious Mental Illness and Public Support for Gun Control Policies. *Am J Psychiatry* 2013;170(5):494-501.
5. Fung YC. *A first course in continuum mechanics (2nd ed.)*. 2nd edition ed. NJ, USA: Prentice-Hall, Inc; 1977.
6. William JB, Michael, D. Basil, Mihai, C. Bocarnea. Social Influence of an International Celebrity: Responses to the Death of Princess Diana. *Journal of Communication*. 2003; 53(4):587-605.