



Misconception about Victimology Theories



Sazelo Michael Mkhize^{1*} and Khanyisile Berlinda Majola²

¹Senior Lecturer, Department of Criminology and forensic Studies, University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

²Department of Criminology and forensic Studies, University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

Submission: November 2, 2021; **Published:** November 18, 2021

***Corresponding author:** Sazelo Michael Mkhize, Senior Lecturer, Department of Criminology and forensic Studies, University of KwaZulu Natal, 269 Mazisi Kunene Rd, University of KwaZulu Natal, Howard campus, Glenwood, Durban, 4041, South Africa

Keywords: Victimology; Criminology; Lifestyle theory; Race; Gender; Social Science; Forensic research

Introduction

Victimology was first proposed as a social science in the 1940s during a shift in interest in victims to gain a better understanding of crime. The early victimologists focused on the role that victims played in crime, which resulted in the concept that some victims contribute to, or precipitate, their victimization [1]. Over the past several decades, the field of victimology has grown dramatically, particularly through developments in the measurement of victimization, the criminal justice response to victims, and attention towards victim trauma and services [2].

Attention to victimisation was expanded through the writings of different scholars who have advanced diverse theoretical frameworks in better understanding why some individuals and groups are victimized at higher rates than others. However, these theories have been criticized as they are perceived as blaming victims for their victimizations. The following theories are frequently criticized for blaming the victims: The Victim Precipitation Theory, Lifestyle theory, Routine activities theories, and Deviant Place Theory.

A brief overview of the theories

Victim precipitation theory

In the 1950s Wolfgang used the phrase “victim precipitation” to characterize circumstances in which the victim was the original aggressor in the activity that resulted in their injury or loss [3]. The victim precipitation theory is of the standpoint that the victims themselves may initiate, either passively or actively, the criminal act that ultimately leads to injury or death. The term “active precipitation” refers to instances in which the victim directly stimulates the perpetrator. Whereas “passive precipitation”

occurs when a victim unintentionally acts in a way or has certain qualities that initiate or encourage an attack.

Passive precipitation is usually the outcome of a power struggle. Scholars have created a close link to its understanding of domestic violence and intimate partner violence. Where the victim is powerless because of the different roles in their relationships. In most studies, the power difference has always maintained focus on women as those with less power and males with the most power because of the masculine assumption relating to them as breadwinners of homes. As a result, passive precipitation occurs, in which the woman is dependent on the man, particularly in a familial group environment. The woman may feel compelled to stay in abusive relationships to maintain a stable and steady family setting, since they may worry being unable to care for their household on their own [4].

Lifestyle Theory

The lifestyle theory maintains that criminals target individuals due to their lifestyle choices. Many victims' options expose them to criminal offenders and situations where crime is likely to occur. This theory also cites research that shows a correlation between the lifestyles of victims and offenders. Both tend to be impulsive and lack self-control, making the victim more likely to put themselves in high-risk situations and the offender more likely to engage in an unlawful act [5].

Any change in an individual's or a group's habitual behaviours, whether of potential victims or offenders, is sufficient to enhance or decrease exposure to risk and give possibilities for victimization [6]. Its ideology maintains the thought that an individual's

demographic features have direct ties to his or her lifestyle and victimization rates (e.g., age, gender, marital status, race and income). This is posited through an understanding of behaviours associated to individuals according to their demographic groups. For example, men of certain age groups and status are believed to hold lifestyles which are linked to those demographics. Young men who are unmarried are believed to participate in environments at late hours of the night because there is no responsibility to be home before late hours [7]. This not only places them at risk of victimization but also at risk to also associating with offenders as this could easily form them part of a lifestyle of the night. According to lifestyle theory, certain people are more vulnerable to victimization because their activities, habits, or customs expose them to a higher frequency of encounter with crime and criminals. This is compatible with the homogamy principle, which states that individuals are more vulnerable to victimization if they regularly associate with or come into touch with members of demographic groupings that contain a disproportionate number of criminals [6]. One's risk to victimization can be heightened or made less by the likelihood that their lifestyle may make them exposed and susceptible to becoming a victim.

Routine activities theory

The routine activities theory by Cohen and Felson emerged in the 1970s. Its notion is of the approach that victimization and crime are caused by people's everyday routine activities, which impact who, where, and when crime happens. According to the Routine Activity Theory, three factors must exist for a crime to be committed: a suitable target, a motivated criminal, and the lack of capable guardians [8].

A suitable target is a person or thing chosen by the perpetrator based on the victim's vulnerability. To determine victim selection, the offender will observe the victim's location, lifestyle, and behaviours [9]. If an offender wishes to break into a residence that appears to provide simple entry and valuables, the criminal must investigate the homeowner's daily activities as well as the security systems in place. Of course, this indicates placing an emphasis on the victim's involvement in the sequence of crime. However, it provides an analysis to the process of thought the offender envisions prior to acting on the offense in question therefore giving detail into how the sequence of offending comes to existence. Capable guardians are individuals or items who help to prevent crime from occurring. Neighbours, instructors, and parents can all be capable guardians. When there is no guardianship, there is a higher rate of victimization and criminality [10]. According to the notion, for a crime to occur, the offender must be motivated. In other words, the criminal must be willing to commit the crime.

The last element is the motivated offender. According to Melander & Hughes [11] this element refers to the inclinations that the offender may have for themselves as an encouraging factor for them to commit an offence. Of course, those inclining factors will vary according to the individual's goal and characteristic to

committing crime. For instance, a teenager newly experimenting with drugs. May be motivated by their need to feed their addiction. Hence placing them in a more motivated state to carry out a criminal act (if need be) which would assist them in getting their drug addiction curbed. Thus, creating a situation in which there will be a victim because of their criminal act.

Deviant Place theory

The deviant place idea holds that the more frequently a victim attends a dangerous location, the more likely they will be exposed to crime, increasing their chances of being victimized. According to the hypothesis, even if the victim does not play a role in inciting the crime, they are nonetheless vulnerable to becoming a victim since they reside in a socially unorganized high-crime area. Residents of high-crime regions face the greatest risk of encountering offenders, even if they do not engage in risky behaviours or lead a dangerous lifestyle [12].

This victimology hypothesis also claims that safety measures done in dangerous neighbourhoods may be of little to no effect because the area's population, rather than the victim's lifestyle choices thus promoting the likelihood of victimization. If a person lives in a deviant neighbourhood, the only option to reduce their chances of becoming a victim of a crime is to relocate to a less deviant and less risky neighbourhood with a lower crime rate.

Purpose of victimisation theories

Theorising is important in all forms of social science research since it aids in analysing

Occurrence of behaviours across varied locations and conditions. It aids in the development of categories that have been systematically associated through declarations of relationships or a more theoretical frame that will explain the phenomenon under discussion and then seek to characterize its origin through that phenomenon and its characteristics [13].

The purpose of victimology theories is not to shift the blame to the victims as it has been argued. However, to provide awareness about the factors that increase the chance of becoming a victim or being targeted. Understanding and studying victims is essential for developing effective deterrence methods because it helps criminologists better understand the roles of all parties involved in the sequential pattern of crime.

Firstly, the purpose of any theory is to explain what we see and figure out how to bring about change. Mainly to identify a particular problem and plan a means of altering the situation. For instance, explanations of how and why crime is committed and explanations of how and why certain people became victims of crime. Cautions about victimisation include informing victims about hot spots, where crime is concentrated. The idea is to inform people to avoid those areas as there is a presence of criminals, not to limit the movement of people. It is up to an individual whether they adopt these kinds of precautions or not.

Moreover, there is much consideration being placed towards studies of female victimization because of the commonality of its occurrence. A lot of studies have placed much emphasis on sexual violence victimization being a result of victim's dress choices. Wearing revealing clothes has been identified as one of the contributing factors to victimisation of women. This is not to say males have the right to victimize females sexually, because of what they wear. However, to cautions women against offenders who are attracted by revealing clothes. A woman can wear short skirts and pass a group of men and receive compliments about her appearance. On the other hand, pass another group of men who will behave differently from the first group as they might exchange derogative words and go to an extent that they touch the woman. The difference in the behaviour of these two groups demonstrates that people are not comparable as there are those who are unable to control themselves and act because they are impulsive. While other people respect women. Thus, the onus in this instance remains on the woman to take precaution measures provided to avoid victimisation.

With that being an apparent reality, victim theories of this sort are imperative to also teach men the importance of self-control and the inadequacy of policing women's bodies in accordance with their inability to control themselves. If such discussions are openly brought up through studies, there becomes an open platform where such inappropriateness is discussed from the perspectives of peers as well as elders who have either had witness of female victimization because of such practices or they themselves have perpetrated and have better clearer understanding from their previous mistake.

An additional precaution is about lifestyle as per the Lifestyle Theory premises. Individuals are warned about Routine activities of going out late at night. This exposes them to the risk of victimisation. Again, the theory does not blame the victims, however, cautions the victims about the presence of criminals at night who are motivated to act at any opportunity that presents itself. Thus, those who are walking alone at night are exposed to victimisation as criminals target them. Thus, to avoid victimisation one needs to avoid going alone at night especially in dangerous places. Furthermore, with an understanding of the patterns of victimization through the lens of one or more of these theories, the criminal justice system, as well as the public, may better be equipped to prevent crime and victimisation. As specified in the

beginning of this paper theories are what guide scholars and other interested entities in understanding the cycle in which societal behaviours influence crime and victimization. Therefore, when studying victimization as an issue, the main premise is to capture the overall occurrence of victimization as it would any other problematic issue within society.

References

1. O'Connell M (2008) *Victimology: A Social Science in Waiting*. *Internal Review of Victimology* 15(2): 91-104.
2. Zaykowski H, Campagna (2014) *Teaching Theories of Victimology*, *Journal of Criminal Justice Education* 25(4): 452-467.
3. Petherick W (2017) *Victim precipitation: Why we need to expand upon the theory*. *Forensic Research and Criminology International Journal* 5(2).
4. Muftić LR, Bouffard LA, Bouffard JA (2007) *An exploratory analysis of victim precipitation among men and women arrested for intimate partner violence*. *Feminist Criminology* 2(4): 327-346.
5. Madero-Hernandez A (2019) *Lifestyle Exposure Theory of Victimization*. *The Encyclopedia of Women and Crime* pp.1-3.
6. Reyns BW, Henson B, Fisher BS, Fox KA & Nobles MR (2016) *A gendered lifestyle-routine activity approach to explaining stalking victimization in Canada*. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 31(9): 1719-1743.
7. Finkelhor D, Asdigian NL (1996) *Risk factors for youth victimization: Beyond a lifestyles/routine activities theory approach*. *Violence and victims* 11(1): 3-19.
8. Argun U, Dağlar M (2016) *Examination of Routine Activities Theory by the property crime*. *Journal of Human Sciences* 13(1): 1188-1198.
9. Wick SE, Nagoshi C, Basham R, Jordan C, Kim YK, et al. (2017) *Patterns of cyber harassment and perpetration among college students in the United States: A test of routine activities theory*. *International Journal of Cyber Criminology* 11(1): 24-38.
10. Choi KS, Earl K, Lee JR, Cho S (2019) *Diagnosis of cyber and non-physical bullying victimization: A lifestyles and routine activities theory approach to constructing effective preventative measures*. *Computers in Human Behavior* 92, pp.11-19.
11. Melander L, Hughes V (2018) *College partner violence in the digital age: Explaining cyber aggression using routine activities theory*. *Partner abuse* 9(2): 158-180.
12. Polakowski M (1994) *Linking self-and social control with deviance: Illuminating the structure underlying a general theory of crime and its relation to deviant activity*. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 10(1): 41-78.
13. Eigenberg H, Garland T (2008) *Victim Blaming. Controversies in Victimology*. Routledge, Page 16.



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License
DOI: [10.19080/GJAA.2021.12.555829](https://doi.org/10.19080/GJAA.2021.12.555829)

**Your next submission with Juniper Publishers
will reach you the below assets**

- Quality Editorial service
- Swift Peer Review
- Reprints availability
- E-prints Service
- Manuscript Podcast for convenient understanding
- Global attainment for your research
- Manuscript accessibility in different formats
(Pdf, E-pub, Full Text, Audio)
- Unceasing customer service

Track the below URL for one-step submission

<https://juniperpublishers.com/online-submission.php>