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15.6 SUMMARY
Study Guide
This chapter provides an introduction to **victimology**, the study of victims and their patterns of victimization. Victimology is a distinct area of scholarly study similar to other fields in the social sciences. Criminology and criminal justice are the two areas of research and theory that most closely relate to victim studies. As in criminology and criminal justice, scholars from a wide variety of disciplines contribute to the growing knowledge base on crime victims and victimization. Sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, historians, psychologists, and even biologists...
have all made substantial contributions to victim studies, just as they have to the study of crime (criminology) and justice-system processes (criminal justice).

Victimology also differs from criminology and criminal justice in important ways. Criminology is concerned with explanations for criminal behavior. Criminologists focus their attention on the study of factors that contribute to people committing criminal acts. Such a focus is the opposite of what victimologists study. Victimologists take as their starting point patterns of victimization rather than patterns of criminal offending. From this perspective the question is not why certain individuals (or groups) engage in criminal behavior; instead, the emphasis is on explaining why certain people (or groups) experience victimization at certain times and in certain places. Similarly, criminal justice research has focused on how criminal offenders are processed through the criminal justice system. Little, if any, attention is given to how crime victims are treated and dealt with by our justice system. Victimologists, in contrast, examine the dynamics of justice administration as it relates to crime victims.

By focusing on aspects of criminal victimization that have been largely ignored, victimology enhances criminology and criminal justice research and theory by filling in important gaps in our knowledge about crime and justice. For example, a theory that purports to explain all crime in all contexts needs to account for the contribution of crime victims to criminal events in order to be complete. If crime is not solely the result of the actions of criminals, then any explanation based only on offenders’ actions is missing half the story.

This chapter begins with what is known about patterns of victimization in the United States, and goes on to answer the following questions:

- How did the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) come into existence?
- To whom is the NCVS administered, and what sorts of information does it obtain?
- What theories have been offered to explain victimization and the circumstances of criminal victimization events?
- What are the financial, physical, and psychological/emotional consequences of personal victimization?
- How does the criminal justice system respond to those who are directly and indirectly affected by criminal victimization?

### 15.2 Estimating Victimization: The National Crime Victimization Survey

In the United States, the primary victimization data-gathering platform is the **National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)**. The NCVS was first fielded in 1973 and was called at that time the National Crime Survey (NCS). The NCVS collects victimization information from a representative sample of about 50,000 American households, totaling nearly 100,000 individuals. Each household is interviewed twice per year, and a household is part of the national sample for three-and-a-half years. Long-standing criticisms of official criminal justice data sources such as the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) reached a fever pitch during the 1960s, culminating in the...
creation of the NCS. The most poignant criticism of the UCR was (and remains) the contention that official measures of crime seriously underestimate the level of crime. Prior to implementation of the NCS, it was widely suspected that a great deal of crime went unreported to the police and was not included in UCR figures. This gap between how much crime actually occurs and the amount of crime that is detected and measured by criminologists is known as the “dark figure of crime.” In addition, UCR statistics are aggregated counts of offenses that do not provide detailed information on particular incidents. In contrast, NCS data provide a much richer data source, containing information on a wide variety of victimization dimensions.

**The Advantages of the NCS and NCVS Data**

*NCs and NCVS data revealed the true extent of crime in the United States.*

Designers of the NCS constructed the survey with five goals in mind:

1. To develop detailed information about the victims of crime
2. To initiate a data-collection effort detailing the consequences of crime
3. To provide systematic information on the dark figure of crime
   a. Estimating the number of crimes not reported to police
   b. Estimating the types of crimes not reported to police
4. To provide uniform measures of selected types of crime
5. To permit comparisons over time and types of areas

Table 15.1 shows the kinds of data included in the NCVS.

When data from the first waves of the NCS were published, the criminological community was startled by the sheer volume of criminal victimizations that had gone undetected by other data sources. It was found that less than 50 percent of all crimes were reported to the police, affirming just how limited the UCR was as a measure of crime.

Ironically, the NCS was revised in 1993 because it, like the UCR, failed to capture critical dimensions of crime. Advocates for battered women, for example, were quick to point out that the original NCS failed to measure adequately the extent of victimizations that occurred within the family. In response to such criticism, the design of the NCS was altered to include new questions (e.g., questions about intimate partner violence). In addition, methodological adjustments were made to help people recall victimization incidents more accurately and reliably. As a result of the redesign, there was a marked increase in nearly all categories of victimization used in previous versions of the NCS, and a baseline was created for aspects of victimization that had never existed.

Perhaps the most striking finding was a 157 percent increase in the rate of rape victimizations reported to researchers. Increased levels of victimization were demonstrated across types of crimes as well; for example, the reported rate of burglary victimization increased 20 percent and that of theft victimizations increased by 27 percent.

| Type of criminal victimization | Victim—offender relationship | Month victimization occurred | Time victimization occurred | Location of victimization | Self-protective actions taken | Self-protection outcomes | Type of property loss | Crime reporting to police | Reasons for nonreporting | Offender characteristics | Drug and/or alcohol use | Victim characteristics | Psychological consequences (victim) | Financial consequences (victim) |

| TABLE 15.1 | Data Elements Included in the NCVS |
Since 1993, reporting rates have demonstrated a significant increase for several offenses, especially in the rate of reporting rape and sexual assaults to police. In 2002, just over half (53.7 percent) of rape and sexual assault victimizations were reported to the police. In 1999, in contrast, barely over a fourth (28 percent) of rape and sexual assault victimizations were reported. Despite the gains that have been made, victims of sexual assault and rape are still more reluctant, on average, to report their victimization to the police than any other group. Overall, in terms of laying an empirical foundation for estimating the dark figure of crime, the NCVS has been tremendously successful, although certainly not perfect, in providing a complete picture of crime.

Trends in Criminal Victimization in the United States.
Most victimization involves property crimes. Crime rates have declined significantly in recent years, for reasons that are not well understood.

According to the most recent NCVS data published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, there were nearly 23 million victimizations of Americans age 12 or older in 2002, consisting of 17.5 million property crimes and 5.3 million violent offenses. For purposes of comparison, UCR figures show a total of 11,877,218 offenses reported to the police in 2002, with 88 percent of those offenses classified as offenses against property. Clearly, the UCR and NCVS provided vastly different estimates of crime in the United States. Despite this disparity, both data-collection platforms share one very important characteristic: they both show a significant decline in crime in the United States for a period of ten consecutive years.

Both the UCR and NCVS prove useful in the study of crime trends, because, despite the various drawbacks of each method, they produce crime data in the same way every year. This has important implications for the study of victimization and crime over time. Even though each measure contains measurement errors, these problems do not differ from one year to the next within jurisdictions. Thus, changes in victimization or crime rates from year to year reflect actual decreases or increases in the level of crime for each reporting jurisdiction. Therefore, when we see decreases in criminal victimization over a period of years, we can conclude with confidence that there really was a decrease.

What are some recent trends in victimization in the United States? NCVS data for 2002 show a reduction in victimizations of 11 percent over two years, from 25.9 million in 2000 to 23 million in 2002. More impressive still is that there was an even more sizable decrease (more than 15 percent) in the level of violent victimization during this period. Overall, as figures 15.1–15.3 show, criminal victimization in the United States has been on the decline for a lengthy period of time. In fact, the rate of criminal victimization in 2002 is the lowest since the inception of the NCS program in 1973.

There are a variety of explanations of why the crime rate has reached all-time lows following a decade that saw violent crime rates reach all-time highs. However, no single explanation has risen to the top as the most plausible. What seems likely is that much of the increase in violent crime in the mid-1990s was due in large part to the creation and expansion of illicit drug markets in the major urban centers of the United States—particularly the sale and distribution of rock (“crack”) cocaine. However, drug markets continue to hold a prominent place in the underground economies of all major U.S. cities. Therefore, the drastic decline in crime cannot be fully accounted for by shifts in drug use by citizens or by actions taken by criminal justice officials in response to illicit drug markets. Other prominent explanations...
for the crime drop are the large number of people incarcerated in jails and prisons, the aging-out of crime by the baby-boom generation, and the unprecedented economic prosperity in the United States since the early 1990s. Most likely, the reductions in crime are due to a combination of all these factors (and more).

**FIGURE 15.1** Recent Victimization Trends in the U.S.: 1973–2002

Note: Violent crime rates calculated as rate per 1,000 persons age 12 or older; property crime rate calculated as rate per 1,000 households.


**FIGURE 15.2** Victimization Trends in the U.S., by Violent Crime Type: 1973–2002

Note: Violent crime rates calculated as rate per 1,000 persons age 12 or older.

It is notable that recent research shows that crime rates have *not* dropped everywhere. In fact, crime rates have leveled off in many jurisdictions and have actually increased in others. Much of the large drop in crime rates in aggregate national statistics comes from significant declines in the five largest U.S. cities, especially New York City. Once the numbers for these large cities are removed from national-level data, the crime-rate drop is much less pronounced and in some instances has even increased.7 Victimologists and criminologists continue to conduct research into the decline in U.S. crime rates.

The Demographics of Criminal Victimization

*Victims of crime generally are more likely to be young males who are members of lower-income minority groups. However, this profile has some important exceptions.*

Like criminal offending, criminal victimization is not randomly distributed among the populace. Patterns of victimization show a high degree of consistency with respect to where and when they occur and who is victimized. This section describes some of the patterns present in the NCVS data for the personal characteristics of crime victims. The primary demographic information collected by the NCVS is for age, gender, race/ethnicity, household income, and marital status.

**Age**

One of the most consistent findings in criminological research is that youths are much more likely than adults to be involved as perpetrators in criminal events. This is an important empirical fact, and a great deal of time has been spent by criminological theorists and researchers trying to understand the precise relationship between age and criminal offending. Similarly, youths between the ages of 12 and 24 stand the greatest chance of becoming the *victims* of crime, especially violent crime. A person aged 12 to 24 is more than twice as likely to suffer a rape as someone aged 25 to 34, and more than three times as likely to be sexually assaulted as someone aged 35 to 49.
For persons in the 16–19 age group, the risk of rape or sexual assault is greatest, with a victimization rate of 4.3 per 1,000, as compared to a rate of 1.3 per 1,000 for those between the ages of 25 and 34. A similar trend, with victims aged 16 to 19 demonstrating the highest level of victimization, exists for all categories of victimization recorded by the NCVS except for simple assault. For simple assault, those aged 12 to 15 are at greatest risk for victimization, with a rate of 43.9 per 1,000.

GENDER

Men are victimized at higher rates than women. For every offense except sexual assault and rape, men dominate victim statistics. To illustrate, NCVS data show that, in 2002, American men were 1.8 times more likely to be robbed and about 1.5 times more likely to be physically assaulted than women. Additionally, of the 14,030 murders reported to the FBI in 2002, more than three-quarters of the victims were male. However, women suffer sexual assault and rape victimizations at a rate 6 times that for men. This statistic isn’t surprising to most observers of crime patterns, but this doesn’t make it any less troubling.

Another important difference between males and females pertains to the relationship between the victim and the offender. In 2002, more than two-thirds of female victims of violent crime indicated that the perpetrator was a nonstranger (meaning the offender was an intimate partner, a relative, or a friend/acquaintance). Just over one-quarter (27 percent) of women were victimized by an intimate partner or other family member. In comparison, males reported that the offender was a nonstranger only 43 percent of the time. An even more striking comparison is the difference in rates of males and females victimized by an intimate partner or family member. For the year 2002, men reported that the person who committed a crime of violence against them was an intimate partner or family member in only 7 percent of all violent victimizations combined, as compared to women, who were victimized by family, including intimate partners, in 27 percent of cases.

RACE

Contrary to what many observers suspect, America’s inner-city poor do not suffer the highest rate of violent victimization. Instead, that dubious distinction goes to a group that resides mainly in rural sections of the United States: American Indian and Alaska Native peoples. In fact, the rate of violent victimization among American Indian/Alaska Native groups throughout the 1990s was twice that of blacks, more than 2.5 times that of whites, and more than 4 times that for people of Asian descent. Furthermore, whereas blacks and whites enjoyed significant decreases in rates of violent victimization during the decade (decreases of 38 percent and 29 percent respectively), victimization rates of American Indians did not change at all. (See figure 15.4.)

African Americans experience homicide at a rate nearly 6 times that of whites, and almost 8 times the rate of Asians and American Indians combined. A partial explanation of the increased risk among African Americans for homicide is found in the use of weapons during violent victimizations. Blacks are the most likely to suffer victimizations in which the offender used a weapon, and the weapon most often used in violent victimizations against African Americans is a firearm, which poses the greatest risk of injury and fatality.
INCOME

In general, the wealthier a person is, the less chance there is of violent victimization. Those with household incomes of less than $7,500 stood the greatest risk of violent victimization in 2002. However, the relationship between income and victimization is not always uniform. Data from the 2002 NCVS show that for aggravated assault, those earning between $35,000 and $49,999 a year had a higher risk of victimization than those in the $25,000–$34,999 range. Similarly, people who earned between $7,500 and $14,999 annually suffered a higher rate of sexual assault victimization than those who earned less than $7,500. (See table 15.2.)

For property crimes, the pattern of victimization varies even more drastically across levels of household income, as table 15.3 shows. According to the NCVS for 2002, those with incomes of more than $75,000 per year had the highest theft victimization rate of any income group, at 142.9 per 1,000 households. It is not so surprising to find that the highest wage earners in the United States experience high rates of property victimization—they have more property for others to steal.

**TABLE 15.2 Violent Victimization by Income Category, 2002**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Category</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Aggravated Assault</th>
<th>Robbery</th>
<th>Rape/ Sexual Assault</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $7,500</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$7,500–$14,999</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000–$24,999</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000–$34,999</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000–$49,999</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.9*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000–$74,999</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000 or more</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.4*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on 10 or fewer sample cases. Violent crime rates calculated as rate per 1,000 persons age 12 or older.

Source: Criminal Victimization, 2002, data tables.
**Situational Characteristics of Victimization**

*Most types of victimization are likely to occur in public places in urban areas at night and without the use of weapons. Again, however, there are important exceptions.*

Just as victimization is not randomly distributed among types of persons, neither is it randomly distributed in time or space. Because American society is highly segregated based on people’s personal characteristics, especially race and income, it is not all that surprising to find that spatial patterns of victimization are highly correlated with the demographic distribution of persons. Victimization is more likely in places where there is a high density of high-risk social groups.

**TIME AND LOCATION**

America’s urban centers hold the bulk of those living at or below the poverty level, and the victimization rate for cities reflects this. In 2002, urban residents had a rate of violent victimization nearly 1.5 times that of their rural resident counterparts.\(^\text{10}\) NCVS data also show that personal victimizations are more apt to occur in public spaces, especially on the street, than in the home. However, it is notable that for victimizations between intimates, this pattern is reversed. Unfortunately, data from the NCVS are limited in other geographic variables, so our knowledge of the sorts of places where particular victimizations occur is limited.

We do know, however, that, for the most part, violent victimizations occur disproportionately during the evening and nighttime hours for adults. Children are more likely to be victimized by a violent crime during daylight hours, usually at school or on the route between home and school. Estimates for the mid-1990s showed that some 2.7 million violent victimizations occurred either at or near schools.\(^\text{11}\) For some property crimes, such as residential burglary, there is a greater likelihood that victimizations will occur during the daytime when residents are away from home at work or play.

**WEAPONS**

Most criminal victimizations in 2002 did *not* involve the use of weapons. Even in the case of robbery, which has the highest rate of weapon involvement, weapons were involved less than half the time. However, in more than half of the cases where victims could discern what type of weapon a robber possessed, it was a gun. In similar fashion, although less than 8 percent of all rapes were committed with a weapon, when a weapon was

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**TABLE 15.3** Property Victimization by Income Category, 2002

*Based on 10 or fewer sample cases. Property crime rates calculated as rate per 1,000 households.

Source: Criminal Victimization, 2002, data tables.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Category</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Theft</th>
<th>MV Theft</th>
<th>Burglary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $7,500</td>
<td>188.9</td>
<td>134.3</td>
<td>3.2*</td>
<td>51.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$7,500–$14,999</td>
<td>166.7</td>
<td>126.8</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000–$24,999</td>
<td>172.1</td>
<td>128.5</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000–$34,999</td>
<td>161.7</td>
<td>121.2</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000–$49,999</td>
<td>175.4</td>
<td>136.9</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000–$74,999</td>
<td>158.3</td>
<td>124.5</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000 or more</td>
<td>169.8</td>
<td>142.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
involved, it was a gun in two-thirds of cases. Only in instances of assault were knives and other instruments as likely to be used as, or more likely to be used than, guns. (See figure 15.5.)

Although weapon use is not the rule in criminal victimizations, when weapons are used, firearms are quite often the weapon of choice. And when offenders use firearms, there is an increased risk of a lethal outcome for both victims and offenders. There is also some evidence of increased risk of injury to victims who resist criminal offenders, due to an escalation of violence. Nevertheless, some research shows that defensive gun use by crime victims may, in some instances, thwart efforts of criminal offenders, thereby preventing some crimes from occurring. NCVS data for 2002 show that African American victims of crime were the most likely to suffer victimizations in which a weapon was used, followed by Asian Americans, American Indians, and whites.

**Interpersonal Dynamics of Victimization**

*Victim-offender relationships vary by type of crime, but most violent crimes are perpetrated by someone known to the victim and in the presence of a third party.*

The relationship between victim and offender is highly variable, depending on the type of criminal victimization. In 2002, rape and sexual assault victims were assaulted by nonstrangers in more than half (52 percent) of all incidents. In contrast, robberies were committed mostly by strangers; better than 70 percent of all robbery victimizations reported were perpetrated by someone the victim did not recognize as knowing prior to the incident. Not insignificant, however, is that 20 percent of robberies were committed by an acquaintance or friend. In general, when all categories are taken into account, violent crime is likely to be committed by someone the victim has at least an acquaintance with.

It is also notable that victims who report never having been married or who are divorced or separated have a significantly higher rate of violent vic-
timization in general, and of rape or sexual assault in particular. Individuals who are presently divorced or have never been married have a risk of rape or sexual assault victimization about 20 times that of individuals who are currently married.

Third-party involvement is often a characteristic of violent-crime victimization. A third party is a person who is present and who witnesses the interaction between a crime victim and a perpetrator but is not directly involved. A study by Mike Planty of violent victimizations in the United States between 1993 and 1999 found that a majority of violent victimizations occurred in the presence of someone besides the offender and the victim. Planty reported that in about two-thirds of all violent victimizations, at least one other party was present at the time the victimization occurred. The presence of third parties was particularly pronounced in assaults. In Planty’s study, third parties were present in an estimated 70 percent of all reported assault victimizations. What is striking is that in most instances third-party onlookers do not take action to stop or prevent the victimization. Victims reported that third parties were more likely to “help” the situation (36 percent) than “make it worse” (11 percent), but that most (44 percent) did nothing at all.

Victimizations that involve perpetrators who are strangers to the victim are more likely to happen in front of others than nonstranger victimizations. Although more than one-third of intimate victimizations occur in the presence of third parties, current data do not specify who these third parties are. Research on family violence would suggest that children are very often witnesses to intimate violence, when they are not victims themselves.

After reading this section, you should be able to

1. compare and contrast sources of data used to estimate the incidence and prevalence of victimization in the United States;
2. evaluate the accuracy and uses of the National Crime Victimization Survey;
3. describe patterns and trends in victimization in the United States over the past thirty years;
4. summarize the most common demographic characteristics of crime victims;
5. summarize the most common situational characteristics that influence who becomes a victim of crime;
6. describe common patterns of interpersonal dynamics in most violent victimizations.

15.3 THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS FOR VICTIMIZATION

We move now from a general description of victimization to some explanations for it. The two most prominent theoretical traditions in victimology are victim-precipitation theories and lifestyle theories of victimization. Victim-precipitation theories attempt to explain victimization through an analysis of the situational contingencies and dynamics that exist in interpersonal interactions. Lifestyle theories of victimization also examine the situational characteristics of victimization events, but they focus more intensely.
on the personal characteristics of victims and offenders. Both of these theoretical approaches place crime victims in an active, rather than a passive, role. After providing an overview of victim-precipitation and lifestyle theories of victimization, this section outlines routine activities theory, which uses the structure of criminal events as a starting point for an explanation for crime victimization. These theories have direct implications for prevention in their explicit focus on the structure of criminal events and the subjective intentions and perceptions of offenders.

Some seventy-five years ago, a prominent criminologist named Edwin Sutherland stated that criminology was more than simply the study of individuals engaged in socially prohibited behavior. Sutherland believed that criminology was a body of knowledge concerned with crime as a social phenomenon, including

1. the process of making laws;
2. the process of breaking laws; and
3. the process of reacting to the breaking of laws.14

Sutherland saw criminology as a multidimensional field of study spanning several aspects of crime phenomena, not just the actions of those defined as criminals. However, Sutherland did not mention the need to study crime victims—those harmed as a result of unlawful acts. Thus, Sutherland’s approach to the study of crime was limited to only one-half of the crime equation, without considering that for every crime there is also a crime victim. This attitude was in keeping with the time in which Sutherland wrote, for the victim had not been “discovered” yet. Victimology had its origins as a distinct area of scholarly inquiry in the 1948 publication of Hans von Hentig’s The Criminal and His Victim.15

Victim-Precipitation Theories

Some theories of victimization are based on the idea that victims themselves precipitate, contribute to, provoke, or actually cause the outcome. These theories are based on the idea that some crimes, especially violent crimes, are interactions, or transactions, between victims and offenders.

In The Criminal and His Victim, von Hentig suggested that crime is a dynamic social interaction in which both parties contribute to the final outcome. Many criminal events cannot be understood solely as encounters in which only one person (the offender) is actively involved: “I maintain that many criminal deeds are more indicative of a subject-object relation than of the perpetrator alone. There is a definite mutuality of some sort….In the long process leading gradually to the unlawful result, credit and debit are not infrequently indistinguishable.”16 What von Hentig meant by this statement is that deciding where the fault lies and who is to blame is not nearly as clear as the law leads people to believe. Rather, the victim often influences his or her own criminal victimization. The term von Hentig coined to describe his understanding of the victim’s role was victim precipitation.

Victim precipitation means that the victim is not simply an object acted upon by a criminal. According to von Hentig, victims engage in behaviors that profoundly influence the result of victimization events. This influence may or may not actually cause their victimization. An example of a common crime in American society may clarify von Hentig’s point:

Charlotte, a young business executive at a prestigious firm, has a nice portable MP3 player in her car. One night, getting home late from work, she parks on the street in front of her apartment and rushes in

Victim precipitation In Von Hentig’s theory, the idea that victims behave in ways that contribute to their victimization in some way or influence the outcome.
to change clothes for an appointment. Running late, Charlotte doesn’t take the time to lock the car before going inside. In the fifteen minutes it takes her to clean up, change clothes, and get back to her car, someone opens the car door and steals her MP3 player.

In this example the victim obviously did not cause the crime to occur. However, the crime might not have happened if Charlotte hadn’t left the car unlocked or, better yet, if she had secured the MP3 player in some way in addition to locking the car. Had the car been locked, the thief would have had to enter by force—for example, smashing a window—which would draw the attention of bystanders and likely thwart the crime. To the extent that locking a car helps to prevent thefts, Charlotte played an active role in her own victimization by not locking the car.

Victim precipitation is said to have three facets:

1. victim proneness,
2. victim contribution, and
3. victim provocation.¹⁷

Victim proneness implies that there is a quality some individuals or groups have that makes them more likely than others to become victims of crime. For example, some say that men may be naturally more aggressive than women and are therefore more susceptible to victimization because of their tendency to stir up trouble and to embrace physical confrontations.

Victims may also contribute indirectly to crime through their negligence, as in the earlier example of a theft from a car. This class of victims is similar to the “victim-prone” group, except that it is their action or lack of action that makes their victimization more likely, rather than any inherent characteristics.

**Victimization as a Social Interaction**

Victim provocation, the third dimension of the victim-precipitation theory, has received a lot of research attention. **Victim provocation** suggests that the victim is the primary cause of his or her victimization. As von Hentig put it, “The detrimental result would not have followed without the actual instigation or provocation of the victim.”¹⁸ Sociologists of crime have focused on this aspect of victim precipitation using a perspective known as **symbolic interactionism**. From this perspective, criminal events are social interactions that resemble “dramaturgical events.”¹⁹ Like actors in a play, the victim and offender engage in a back-and-forth performance, often in front of an audience. But usually the outcome of the criminal event is not scripted. That is, the actions of one actor depend on those of the other, and so the final outcome is not totally predictable. Each actor reads and interprets the other’s actions and then reacts in a manner he or she thinks appropriate.

Marvin Wolfgang’s 1958 study of Philadelphia homicides, taken from police records for the years 1948 to 1952, brought the concept of victim provocation into the mainstream of criminological thought. Wolfgang found that in a large proportion of criminal homicide incidents (26 percent) the victim had actually initiated the confrontation, either verbally or through physical force.²⁰

**Criminal Violence as a Situated Transaction**

David Luckenbill built on the ideas proposed by von Hentig and Wolfgang to formulate a theory of homicide that he called a **situated transaction**.²¹ Luckenbill identified a series of six scripted steps that occur within a situation, such as a violent confrontation resulting in homicide:

**Victim provocation** The idea that victims behave in ways that cause their victimization; a form of victim-blaming

**Symbolic interactionism** The theoretical perspective that social behavior, including criminal offending and victimization, can be understood in terms of interpersonal interaction among actors in a social setting

**Situated transaction** In Luckenbill’s theory, the “script” followed by actors in face-to-face interaction in a specific situation, such as a homicide
1. Opening move (precipitating event) is made.
2. Opening move is interpreted as offensive.
3. Offender offers verbal “challenge” to victim.
4. Offender and victim reach a tacit agreement to engage in violence.
5. Victim appears committed to “battle.”
6. Incident is terminated.

Luckenbill found that in a significant proportion of homicide incidents, the victim issued a challenge to the offender, which was perceived by the offender as a tacit agreement to engage in violence to settle the dispute. Both parties then engaged in what can only be termed mutual combat, with the loser (“victim”) ending up dead and the winner (“offender”) being charged with homicide. Because homicide usually involves people who are intimately involved with one another, victim-provocation theory provides potent insight into the dynamics of intimate killings. This is especially true when victims are murdered by their abused partners.

Research on Victimization in Intimate Partner Homicides and Rapes

A recent study by Richard Felson and Steven Messner found that 46 percent of homicide incidents in a sample of women arrested for killing a male intimate partner were precipitated by some sort of physical attack by their victim. An additional 9 percent of such incidents were found to be acts of self-defense. Similar findings had been reported some ten years earlier in a study of 145 homicides in which women were found to be the perpetrators. Furthermore, Felson and Messner found that “homicides in which females kill their male partners are distinctive in that these male partners are especially likely to have histories of prior violence.” Thus, victim precipitation in homicides can extend to prior incidents of abuse.

Victim-precipitation theory also helps to explain intimate killings when an abusive partner, usually a male, murders his mate. A detailed analysis of Australian homicides revealed male-female homicides to be largely an issue of male control, in which men were provoked either by another man competing for the affections of the same woman or by the woman showing interest in another man: “The overriding theme that runs through these killings is masculine control, where women become viewed as possessions of men, and the violence reflects steps taken by males either to assert their domination over ‘their’ women, or to repel males who they feel are attempting to control their sexual partner.” This example demonstrates the care that must be taken when examining the intricate dynamics of interpersonal conflict. Suggesting that abused women who were murdered by their batterers played an active role in their own victimization may be interpreted as victim blaming.

Theories of victimization based on the victim-precipitation concept have been, and continue to be, controversial. The largest firestorm of controversy surrounded the 1967 publication of an article by Menachem Amir entitled “Victim-Precipitated Forcible Rape” and a subsequent book by the same title. A student of Wolfgang, Amir categorized as “victim-precipitated” nearly one in five forcible rapes that he studied in Philadelphia between 1958 and 1960. He defined victim-precipitated rapes as those in which the victim agreed to sexual intercourse before the act but “retracted” immediately preceding sexual relations. The hint that rape victims were in any way responsible for their victimization was
not well received by advocates for sexually abused women and victimologists, and it continues to be debated. Others defend the victim-precipitation construct on the basis that it does not cast blame but attempts to explain the situational dynamics inherent in victimizations of any type.


**Limitations of Victim-Precipitation Theories**

Victim-precipitation theories make clear that we must focus on more than merely the categories of the persons involved (i.e., “victim” or “offender”). We should also pay close attention to how actors are influenced by and participate in situational factors of crime events. If there is too much focus on the behavior of the offender, a great deal of information is lost about the causes of victimization—particularly in crimes of interpersonal violence.

Victim-precipitation theories have their limitations, however. Critics claim that victim-precipitation theories are relevant only to violent crime or to particular forms of unlawful violence. An implicit assumption of victim-precipitation theory is that the victim and offender interact in direct contact. For offenses such as burglary, however, the perpetrator intentionally tries to avoid the victim or other sources of resistance. Thus, victim-precipitation theory is limited in the types of victimization it can explain.

**Lifestyle Theories**

*Lifestyle theories explain personal victimization as an outgrowth of a victim’s high-risk behavior patterns and associations.*

Another general theory of victimization that does not rely on the interpersonal dynamics between victim and offender is known as lifestyle theory. In
1978, Michael Hindelang, Michael Gottfredson, and James Garofalo formulated a theory of personal victimization based on extensive analysis of data taken from household surveys conducted in eight cities in 1972. In their examination of the city survey data, these researchers found that although rates of victimization fluctuated from city to city, individual and situational factors within each locale remained much the same. For example, in all eight cities youths stood a much greater risk of victimization than older persons, and men had substantially higher rates of victimization than women. The challenge was to explain why victimizations in these eight cities differed in quantity but were nearly identical in quality. Their answer became known as the lifestyle theory of victimization.

Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo focused their attention on both the situational factors surrounding victimizations and the characteristics of the people involved in them, both offenders and victims. They determined that for a personal victimization to occur, the following conditions must be met:

1. The prime actors must have occasion to intersect in time and space.
2. Some source of dispute or claim must arise between them in which the victim is perceived by the offender as an appropriate object of the victimization.
3. The offender must be willing and able to threaten or use force (or stealth) to achieve the desired end.

The crux of the problem, according to Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo, is to locate the factors that lead to these conditions. For example, what determines a person’s exposure to high-risk situations? What are the forces that contribute to victims and offenders coming into contact with each other? The answer, for these researchers, rested largely with a potential victim’s lifestyle.

**Theory of Personal Victimization**

Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo were among the first to systematically detail the nonrandom nature of personal victimization. Victimizations are not evenly distributed among the population; different groups suffer different rates of victimization. What’s more, personal victimizations occur disproportionately in particular circumstances, such as at night, when victims are alone, and when there is a relationship between victim and offender. Thus, personal victimization is the end result of a complex sequence.

Lifestyle stands as the centerpiece of the theory of personal victimization because it is the patterned routines of a person’s everyday activities that predict the chances of exposure to criminogenic situations. After all, if a victim and an offender never come into contact, a personal victimization cannot occur.

The theory of personal victimization does not try to explain the social and psychological dynamics of a criminal event, as did von Hentig and Wolfgang, nor do Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo set out to explain why New York City has one level of victimization and Los Angeles another. Rather, the focus is on the pattern of risk factors common to victimization in both cities.

So, what is meant by “lifestyle,” and how does it relate to victimization? According to Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo, lifestyle “refers to routine daily activities, both vocational activities (work, school, keeping house, etc.) and leisure activities.” Lifestyle is primarily concerned with what
people do in the course of their daily lives. Lifestyles are the result of individual and group adaptations to social and cultural constraints. For example, an individual’s socioeconomic status places constraints on his or her choice of housing, place of residence, access to postsecondary education, access to jobs, and the like.

Likewise, cultural beliefs define behavioral expectations that impose limitations on a person’s behavior. For example, consider the familiar roles of student and professor. Each is expected to behave and interact in a certain manner in the classroom. The constraining power of the cultural definitions of “student” and “professor” rests with their widespread acceptance. If behavior deviates from what is defined as appropriate, sanctions are likely. Both social-structural and cultural constraints limit the choices available to people and thus limit possible courses of action.

Despite the limitations imposed by these forces, individuals adapt to both social-structural and cultural constraints in the course of their everyday lives: someone works extra hours to afford a mortgage; students pass notes to communicate with each other rather than risk talking during class. According to lifestyle theory, such adaptations are generally not random or idiosyncratic. People adapt their vocational and leisure activities to constraints in predictable, patterned ways. Resulting lifestyles influence an individual’s level of exposure to situations that are directly related to victimization. Social environments vary in the risk they pose for personal victimization, based on the numbers and types of potential criminal offenders that populate those environments. Lifestyle directly influences personal victimization by bringing people into contact with offenders in the course of their daily lives. If, for example, the route a person drives to work passes through a high-crime area, then that person’s chances of personal victimization are greater than those of another person whose work travel avoids high-crime areas. Similarly, where an individual goes on a Saturday night for entertainment can increase exposure to high-risk environments. A married couple who go out to a movie and dinner at a suburban mall every Saturday night stand a significantly different chance of being victimized than a single male who frequents inner-city nightclubs.

**Differential Association**

In addition to influencing personal victimization directly through exposure to various situational environments, lifestyle also affects one’s risk of victimization indirectly by structuring personal associations. That is, the people with whom one associates also determine one’s exposure to risk of personal victimization. People who associate regularly with others engaged in unlawful behavior are more likely to be victimized, because of their increased exposure to high-risk situations and environments. **Differential association,** thus, is a major factor in crime. As Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo describe, “Associations refer to more or less sustained personal relationships among individuals that evolve as a result of similar lifestyles and hence similar interests shared by these individuals. Because offenders disproportionately have particular characteristics, association with people having these characteristics serves to increase exposure to criminal victimization.”

A quick examination of two complimentary pieces of crime data—arrests and victimizations for the year 2002—demonstrates this point. According to the UCR, 52.4 percent of all robbery arrests in 2002 were attributable to people 16 to 24 years of age, despite the fact that this demographic comprised only approximately 15 percent of the U.S. population that year. Based on this information, those between the ages of 16 and 24 are considered to be a
high-risk group of offenders. Data compiled from the NCVS reveal that the age group at greatest risk for robbery victimization is also youths between the ages of 16 and 24. (See figures 15.6 and 15.7.) The correspondence between those who victimize and those who are victimized is predicted by lifestyle theory, because youths associate primarily with other youths. This reality has the unfortunate, but very real, consequence of increasing exposure to likely criminal offenders and high-risk environments.

Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo set out eight propositions based on their theory:

**FIGURE 15.6** Robbery Arrest Rates and Age, 2002

**FIGURE 15.7** Robbery Victimization and Age, 2002
*Note: Robbery victimization rate calculated as rate per 1,000 persons age 12 or older. Source: C. M. Rennison and M. R. Rand, Criminal Victimization, 2002, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, August 2003, data tables.*
1. The probability of suffering a personal victimization is directly related to the amount of time that a person spends in public places (e.g., on the street, in parks), and particularly in public places at night.

2. The probability of being in public places, particularly at night, varies as a function of lifestyle.

3. Social contacts and interactions occur disproportionately among individuals who share similar lifestyles.

4. An individual’s chances of personal victimization are dependent upon the extent to which the individual shares demographic characteristics with offenders (e.g., age, sex, socioeconomic status, marital status).

5. The proportion of time that an individual spends among nonfamily members varies as a function of lifestyle.

6. The probability of personal victimization, particularly personal theft, increases as a function of proportion of time that an individual spends among nonfamily members.

7. Variations in lifestyle are associated with variations in the ability of individuals to isolate themselves from persons with offender characteristics.

8. Variations in lifestyle are associated with variations in the convenience, desirability, and vincibility of the persons as targets for personal victimization.

**Perpetrators and Victims Share the Same Characteristics**

When one compares the personal characteristics of those victimized by crime with the personal characteristics of those who commit criminal offenses, one is struck by the high degree of similarity between them. Criminals and their victims more often than not belong to the same social groups, a fact which contradicts the conventional wisdom that says criminal offenders and law-abiding victims are two distinct and separate groups. On the basis of interpersonal dynamics, determining who is the offender and who is the victim is not always so clear-cut.

Criminals are often depicted as outlaws who stand outside of society, separate and distinct from the conventional majority. However, a close look at victimization data shows that predatory crimes usually take place within the same social groups rather than between different ones. For example, violent crimes, especially assaults, are generally intraracial (within the same racial groups), not interracial (between different racial groups). This is especially true for blacks and whites. According to data from the NCVS from 1993 to 1998, 76 percent of all violent victimizations reported by black respondents were perpetrated by blacks. Similarly, 66 percent of all violent victimizations between 1993 and 1998 reported by whites were attributed to white offenders.

As mentioned previously, the distribution of crime victims by age closely resembles that of criminal offenders by age. In 2002, the average annual victimization rate per 1,000 persons for simple assault among those between the ages of 16 and 19 was 36.7. The next-highest victimization rate was 34.3 for victims in the 12–15 age group. Crime statistics from the UCR show that in 2002 the highest arrest rate for simple assaults, at a rate of 8.93 per 1,000, was also for persons between the ages of 16 and 19 years—the same group with the highest rate of victimization for simple assault. This pattern emerges for rape and sexual assault as well. (See table 15.4.)

For violent victimization in which the relationship between the victim and the offender was known, for the period 1993–1998, nearly 4 in 10 males reported that the offender was known to them as an intimate, a rela-
tive, a friend, or an acquaintance. For females, the degree to which victims and offenders knew one another is even more striking: nearly 6 in 10 victims characterized the person or persons who victimized them as non-strangers. That offenders and victims tend to know one another is not terribly surprising—victims and offenders share many demographic characteristics. Minorities and those located at or near poverty level not only have a disproportionate rate of offending but also are most likely to suffer both violent and property victimizations. The assertion that, in the aggregate, victims and offenders are one and the same is also supported when we look across other crime categories. Although there isn’t a perfect correspondence between victim and offender age, it is clear that youths, broadly defined, are at greatest risk for both victimization and offending.

As table 15.5 shows, the pattern of association established for age also exists for gender, with one important exception. Men are more likely than women to be both victims and offenders for the crimes of assault (simple and aggravated), robbery, and homicide (data not shown). The pattern reverses when it comes to rape and sexual assault; women are 6 times more likely to be victims but nearly 90 times less likely to be arrested as perpetrators. In other words, rape and sexual assault victimization is heavily gendered, with women suffering the vast majority of victimizations at the hands of men.

TABLE 15.4  Victimization and Arrest Rates, by Offense and Age

2. Based on 10 or fewer sample cases.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime Category</th>
<th>Victimization Rate (per 1,000 persons)</th>
<th>Arrest Rate (UCR) (per 1,000 persons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SIMPLE ASSAULT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12–15 yrs</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>6.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–19</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>8.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–24</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>8.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–34</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>6.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35–49</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–64</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and older</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ROBBERY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12–15 yrs</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–19</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–24</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–34</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35–49</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–64</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and older</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AGGRAVATED ASSAULT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12–15 yrs</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–19</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–24</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–34</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35–49</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.44</td>
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<tr>
<td>50–64</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and older</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RAPE/SEXUAL ASSAULT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12–15 yrs</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.11</td>
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<td>0.5*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>50–64</td>
<td>0.2*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.1*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Routine Activities Theory

Routine activities theories explain victimization as an offender’s rational choice to risk potential negative consequences of offending in favor of potential gains.

Lifestyle theories attempt to explain why certain people or groups get victimized, and victim-precipitation theories attempt to explain why certain interactions result in criminal victimization and others do not. A third type of theory focuses on the contexts of crime in terms of the opportunities for victimization. In 1979, Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson developed an approach for analyzing changes in the level of crime over time known as routine activities theory. Like the lifestyle theory, it recognizes the importance of people’s everyday actions in an explanation for criminal victimization. Routine activities theorists assume all humans are motivated by the desire to have things that give them pleasure or benefit and to avoid those things and situations that inflict pain. Most important to the explanation for criminal victimization, according to Cohen and Felson, are the differential opportunities that exist for victimization.

Differential Opportunities

Differential opportunities are determined by the structure of our everyday lives: the time we leave home, the route we take to work, our mode of transportation, our favorite places for entertainment, and other routines of contemporary existence. Routine activities theory focuses on the circumstances in which crime occurs.

The routine activities approach to crime is limited to an explanation for predatory crime. Cohen and Felson define predatory crime as acts “involving direct physical contact between at least one offender and at least one person or object which that offender attempts to take or damage.” Because Cohen and Felson include objects as well as persons in their definition of predatory crime, the theory is not limited to interpersonal offenses such as assault, robbery, or rape. Property offenses such as burglary or larceny can be considered predatory crimes as well.

Predatory victimization depends on the interaction of three variables in a social situation:

**TABLE 15.5**  
Victimization and Arrest Rates, by Gender  
*Based on 10 or fewer sample cases.  
1. The presence of at least one likely offender
2. The presence of at least one suitable target
3. The absence of capable guardians (who might prevent the crime)

Figure 15.8 shows the relationships between these three variables in any situation or "social space" where there is an opportunity for crime. The suitable target arrives in this space through lifestyle behaviors. The likely offender arrives through rational choices. The opportunity for crime is enhanced as the potential guardian departs or is absent from the space.

Unlike other explanations for criminal victimization, routine activities theory is quite unconcerned with the role played by the victim. In strong contrast to victim-precipitation theories, routine activities theory treats the offender as active and the victim as passive. Offenders are seen as making calculated decisions—"rational" choices—to commit crime based on their perceptions of target suitability and likelihood of detection and sanction by others. Routine activities explanations for criminal victimization call attention to issues of social change that have affected guardianship, such as large-scale changes in Americans’ routine work and leisure activities that have, in turn, affected safety and security.

During the post–World War II era there was a dramatic shift in the composition of the workforce. Women had sustained the U.S. economy when the bulk of the male workforce was at war, an occurrence that forever altered the makeup of the American labor force. More women had been working outside the home than at any other time in history. Many women continued to work outside the home even after the conclusion of World War II.

In addition, the automobile transformed the way people went to work and where they lived. Not only were more people working, but also commuting made for longer absences away from home. The car also provided people a means of escape for holidays and vacation. This newly developed mode of transportation was coupled with brand-new interstate and intrastate highway systems. Whereas the prewar vacation was spent largely close to home, advances in the U.S. transportation system allowed Americans to venture farther away from home for their leisurely pursuits.
During this period, roughly 1950–1970, the United States witnessed drastic increases in both property crimes and personal crimes. Why? Changes in the populace’s routine activities created greater opportunities for crime. Homes were left unattended, making them easier to burglarize. Also, as the population became more mobile, it became more exposed to high-risk environments. And the postwar economy provided more things of value to steal. These macrolevel changes in U.S. society affected overall rates of crime by creating more targets suitable for predatory crime and by decreasing social controls (guardianship) to guard against crime.

**Rational Choice Theory of Crime**

The key assumption of routine activities theory is the idea that crime is motivated through “rational” choice. **Rational choice theory** is based on the fundamental belief that human behavior is directed toward those things which bring pleasure and/or benefit or minimize painful, unpleasant experiences. The founder of this view in criminology was an eighteenth-century Italian criminologist, Cesare Beccaria, who believed that crime could be prevented by developing sanctions that imposed sufficient pains (“costs” in economic terms) on criminal offenders that they would be deterred from committing further crimes.31 To the extent that negative costs exceed positive gains, Beccaria thought, would-be criminals would not choose to engage in conduct in violation of the law.

A British philosopher named Jeremy Bentham expanded on Beccaria’s ideas. Bentham proposed that legislation be drafted based on the **principle of utility**, which quantifies Beccaria’s theory of deterrence. According to Bentham, humans are more than pleasure-seeking beings; they are pleasure maximizers and/or pain minimizers.32 Thus, people are seen as quintessential economists, continually weighing the costs and benefits of every action so as to maximize benefits. From this perspective the probability of victimization differs with each situation, because with each changing situation comes a different balance of inducements to crime.

Although rational choice is very much an offender-centered theory of crime and not a theory of victimization per se, the perspective has profound implications for the prevention of victimization. If rational choice theorists are correct, victimizations can be reduced by altering the balance of costs and benefits for likely offenders. One way to do this is called **target hardening**. Target-hardening activities can be used to make the effort and risk required to commit crimes too great relative to the potential rewards to be gained. For example, you may remember a simple auto-theft-prevention device called The Club, which was popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The Club is a tempered steel bar that drivers can lock to the steering wheel of their cars when not driving. The device consists of a bar about three feet in length, with a fork on each end. When a driver exits the car, he or she simply places the bar across the steering wheel and locks it in place. The bar makes it impossible for someone to steer a car even if he or she successfully enters the auto, gets it started, and puts it into gear. By simply increasing the difficulty of escaping with a vehicle, say rational choice theorists, auto thefts can be reduced significantly.33

People can take similar precautions to help prevent violent victimizations as well. For example, college students, especially women, are warned not to use unlit paths at night, and if they must, to move in groups. There is safety in numbers because they change the cost-benefit analysis for would-be victimizers. With more people comes the increased probability of guardianship, detection, and perhaps apprehension. Intimate partner abusers often seek...
first to isolate their victims from others, both geographically and socially, so that their abuse will go undetected. Particularly for women involved in potentially abusive relationships, maintaining social contact with family and friends is an important means of preventing personal victimization.

After reading this section, you should be able to

1. identify three major types of theories that attempt to explain the causes of victimization;
2. explain how a victimization can be analyzed as a social interaction and as a situated transaction;
3. contrast victim-precipitation theories with victim-provocation theories as explanation for victimization in intimate partner homicides;
4. compare and contrast victim-precipitation with lifestyle theories of victimization;
5. explain why victims and offenders share essentially the same characteristics;
6. compare and contrast lifestyle theories and routine activities theory;
7. give examples of the roles of differential association and differential opportunity in instances of violent crime;
8. explain the rational choice theory of crime;
9. give examples of how each theory described in this section could be applied to prevent or reduce victimization.

15.4 CONSEQUENCES OF VICTIMIZATION

Policy makers use crime statistics to make informed policy decisions and ultimately may influence criminal justice priorities. Despite the limitations of victimization data sources, the figures are useful as an indicator of the total amount of crime and long-term trends. However, these statistics fail to capture the impact that crime has on crime victims and society. The numbers tend to overshadow the harm, suffering, and trauma caused by crime. This section focuses on the consequences of victimization by describing the financial, physical, psychological, and secondary impact of crime.

Financial Impact

In the United States, the costs of tangible and intangible damage and loss in personal victimizations amount to $1,800 per person per year.

An important study examining the costs of victimization is a 1996 report published by the National Institute of Justice entitled Victim Costs and Consequences: A New Look. This study finds that personal crimes cost more than $100 billion annually in tangible losses, such as property damage and loss, medical and mental health care, productivity losses, and costs related to providing assistance to victims. Of these tangible costs, property damage and loss and lost productivity are the most costly for crime victims. It is estimated that nationally the costs per woman, man, and child to cover these tangible losses is $425 annually. The study also attempts to quantify intangi-
ble losses, such as the amount of pain and suffering and reduced quality of life caused by crime. When these intangible losses are considered, the costs of victimization increase to more than $450 billion annually, and the cost to cover these additional losses rises to approximately $1,800 per person. What is even more staggering about these figures is that they exclude several types of serious crime from the cost estimations, including white-collar and drug-related crimes.

Table 15.6 shows the costs per victimization for several types of crime. Violent crime accounts for over 90 percent of the tangible and intangible costs of crime. Intangible costs are generally higher than tangible costs for personal crimes but lower than tangible costs for property crimes. For example, the intangible costs for murder are almost double the tangible costs, and the tangible costs for burglary are almost 4 times higher than the intangible costs.

It is important to remember that the figures presented in the table are costs per victimization. These figures would have to be multiplied by the total number of offenses in each category for an estimation of the overall financial impact of these crimes. The following facts provide a broader perspective for understanding the impact of crime on individual victims and society:

- Violent crime causes 3 percent of U.S. medical spending and 14 percent of injury-related medical spending.
- Violent crime results in wage losses equivalent to 1 percent of American earnings.
- Violent crime is a significant factor in mental health care usage. As much as 10 to 20 percent of mental health care expenditures in the United States may be attributable to crime, primarily for victims treated as a result of their victimization.
- Personal crime reduces the average American’s quality of life by 1.8 percent. Violence alone causes a 1.7 percent loss.36

**Physical and Psychological Impact**

*Short-term and long-term physical and psychological effects of personal victimization can include permanent injury and posttraumatic stress disorder, especially for rape victims and victims of child abuse.*

Violent crime produces direct, indirect, and long-term physical ailments. Many injuries are permanent. Direct physical effects include death, bruises, abrasions, broken bones, and cuts.37 Firearm violence in the United States is widespread, and research indicates it is one of the leading causes of death of young adults and the leading cause of death of African Americans.38 Domestic violence and child abuse are also widespread and underreported, and many victims who are battered suffer a range of physical and psychological problems.39 Over 80 percent of spousal assaults result in injury, 7 percent in unconsciousness, and over 6 percent in broken bones.40
Indirect physical effects of victimization include an inability to sleep, loss of appetite, and a general loss of interest in physical activities. Many victims of crime, and the public generally, fear they will be victimized again, which affects their lifestyles, feelings of vulnerability, and physical health. Crime may also have a long-term physical impact on crime victims. Victims are more likely to suffer ulcers, have heart problems, and abuse drugs and alcohol. Physical injuries that are permanent may also have a negative effect on psychological recovery, because the physical scars are a constant reminder of the crime.

In 1993, Monica Seles was the number-one-ranked tennis player in the world at only nineteen years old and had compiled many tournament victories, including eight Grand Slam titles. In late April she was playing in a quarterfinal match against Magdalena Maleeva in a tournament in Hamburg, Germany. During a break in the match, Gunther Parche, a fan of Steffi Graf, who at the time was the number-two-ranked player in the world, leaned over a courtside railing and stabbed Seles in the back. She collapsed and was eventually taken to the hospital for treatment. Parche was arrested.

Seles recovered relatively quickly from the physical injuries caused by the attack and started to train to return to competitive tennis. However, her comeback was slowed significantly because of the deep emotional scars caused by the attack. She would often dream about the attack when she could sleep at all, waking up to feelings that she was reliving the incident and her reactions to it. She was afraid that Parche was still stalking her and became reluctant to leave her home, and she became severely depressed. When she was finally convinced to get some help, she was diagnosed as suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), an ailment in which a victim is unable to work through the crisis caused by victimization. The National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder describes PTSD as a psychiatric disorder that occurs following the experience or witnessing of life-threatening events, such as crime victimization. Symptoms of PTSD include flashbacks, recurring nightmares, sleep disturbances, outbursts of anger, emotional numbing, and feelings of detachment. With the help of a sports psychologist, Seles was able to work through the pain and eventually made her successful return to competitive tennis.

It may be difficult for people who have not been victimized by crime to understand why Monica Seles had trouble recovering emotionally from her victimization. Being a victim of crime is a major crisis, and all victims suffer some psychological disruption following the event. Some victims are able to regain perspective quickly and focus on moving forward with their lives. Other victims, like Seles, need the assistance of a trained counselor to recover from the pain and suffering caused by crime.

Victims of crime experience many of the same crisis reactions as war veterans, victims of natural disasters, people suffering a terminal illness, or people losing a family member from an unexpected, traumatic death. The psychological effects of crime include both short- and long-term reactions to victimization. Among the effects experienced in the immediate aftermath of crime are disbelief, confusion, numbness, shame, anger, and denial. Many victims react by going into shock.

During an attack, victims may experience “fight or flight” syndrome. Some victims experience a temporary paralysis and subsequently are critical of their reaction, feeling guilty or blaming themselves for the attack. In general, these short-term reactions are experienced within twenty-four to forty-eight hours of the incident. After overcoming these initial reactions, crime victims begin to reorganize their lives, but recovery may take a long time. Victims often feel like they are riding an emotional roller coaster.

**Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** A psychiatric disorder that occurs after experiencing or witnessing life-threatening events, such as crime victimization.
because at times they feel in control and forget about the victimization but may later experience a significant shift in mood and relive it again. Triggering events often bring about these mood shifts. Such shifts are normal reactions to crisis, but the emotional roller coaster can take a toll. Some long-term effects of victimization include insomnia, anxiety, lower self-esteem, isolation, alienation, helplessness, lifestyle changes, and increased feelings of vulnerability and fear.47

Some victims never get the help they need and slip into long bouts of depression, alcoholism, and/or drug use. Other victims find positive outlets for their pain, such as working as an advocate for crime victims. Survivors started some of the most influential victims’ rights organizations. For example, Mothers against Drunk Driving (MADD) was founded by a group of women including Candy Lightner and Cindy Lamb. Lightner’s daughter Cari was killed by a drunk driver, and Lamb’s daughter became the country’s youngest quadriplegic after being hit by a drunk driver. Both offenders had multiple prior arrests for drunk driving.48

In general, the more serious the crime, the stronger and longer the victim’s reaction.49 For example, other than murder, rape is considered the most traumatic adult crime. It takes at least three months before the initial symptoms of rape begin to stabilize, and many victims suffer long-term psychological distress.50 Rape victims suffer from fear, anxiety, depression, and social maladjustment. Their relationships with other people often change dramatically, and marriages and other relationships may end after a rape. In their lifetimes, rape victims are more likely to use medical and mental health services, are more likely to attempt or contemplate suicide, and suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder.51

Children are also particularly susceptible to suffering long-term psychological effects from victimization. This is particularly distressing because children are more prone to victimization than adults. Children and youths are often the victims of murder, rape, and assault. Homicide, for example, is one of the leading causes of child mortality. The perpetrator is often somebody the child knows and trusts, such as a parent or sibling. Child victims suffer from long-term physical, mental, and emotional impairments, including low self-esteem, substance abuse, depression, and impaired physical development. Abused children may suffer from “complex posttraumatic stress disorder,” which can result in substantial personality changes.52

Cathy Widom, a leading scholar who has assessed the long-term effects of child victimization, has documented what is called the “cycle of violence.”53 She discovered that children who are abused and neglected are more likely than others to become delinquents, to commit crimes as adults, and to commit violent crimes. Almost half the victims in the study were arrested for a nontraffic offense by age thirty-two.54 Child victims of abuse and neglect also had lower intellectual performance, were more likely to be unemployed, and were more likely to attempt suicide.55

Secondary Victimization
Effects of criminal victimization often include additional suffering at the hands of unsupportive friends and family, news media, and the criminal justice system.

The pain and suffering caused by crime can often be compounded by a lack of support of family, friends, and social institutions.56 Secondary victimization refers to the victimization caused not by the criminal act but by the inappropriate response of institutions and individuals.57 Criminal justice

Complex PTSD A term used by psychologists to describe the effects of a prolonged period of negative stress

Secondary victimization Victimization caused not by a criminal act but by the inappropriate response of institutions and individuals
personnel, reporters, medical personnel, spiritual leaders, government bureaucrats, and friends and family members of the victim all can exacerbate the harm caused by the victimization because of a lack of empathy for the victim’s needs. For example, family and friends of victims may suffer psychological pain and have symptoms similar to those experienced by crime victims. They may withdraw from a victim and do not provide the needed support. Many even blame the victim for causing his or her own victimization. However, victims are able to recover more quickly from their victimization and suffer fewer adverse reactions if they are effectively supported by family members and friends.

**The Criminal Justice System**

A primary goal of the criminal justice system is to respond effectively to an incident once it is reported to the police. Law enforcement focuses on solving crimes and making arrests. Prosecutors are concerned with getting convictions. Correctional officials must attempt to balance the needs to punish and to rehabilitate offenders. During what is generally a lengthy process, defendants are afforded important rights and procedural protections, ensuring that criminal justice personnel stay within the boundaries of the law. These rights and procedures, however, often conflict with the immediate and long-term needs of crime victims.

The criminal justice system can contribute to a secondary victimization in two general ways. First, criminal justice professionals may respond inappropriately to victims. The response by law enforcement personnel is particularly important because they are among the first people with whom victims have contact following the incident. Some examples of inappropriate behavior include insensitive or disinterested questioning, demeaning remarks, and blaming victims for contributing to their victimization. For a victim, a crime is an incredibly stressful and traumatic event. For criminal justice personnel, who have seen possibly hundreds of similar incidents, the tendency is to treat cases as mundane and routine.

A second way the criminal justice system may contribute to a victim’s pain and suffering is through flaws in its delivery of services. For example, a victim may show up to court to testify at trial only to be told that the case has been continued to a later date or that a plea bargain was accepted without consulting the victim. In addition, courthouses are crowded places, providing opportunities for family or friends of the accused to approach victims to intimidate them and convince them not to testify. One national study reports that over half of the prosecutors surveyed in large jurisdictions and over 40 percent of prosecutors in small jurisdictions said that intimidation of victims was a major problem. Furthermore, if an offender is convicted and sentenced to prison, the victim may not be told when the offender is released on parole. Although many significant improvements have been made to limit secondary victimization, victims remain frustrated by the criminal justice system. Many refuse to exert the time and energy to participate, because of the lack of compassion and support demonstrated by criminal justice personnel.

**News Media**

In the 1998 film *The Accused*, Jodie Foster plays a woman who is gang-raped on a pinball machine at a tavern. The film effectively shows the physical and psychological trauma caused by rape. It also depicts how the victim was revictimized by both the news media and the criminal justice system. It por-
trays the case as a celebrated media event causing reporters to invade the victim’s right to privacy. The prosecutor, fearing the victim would not be a good witness because she was dressed “seductively” the night of the rape, accepts a plea bargain without consulting the victim.62

The film is loosely based on an actual rape perpetrated by four men at a bar in New Bedford, Massachusetts.63 The media coverage of the case was so excessive and traumatizing for the victim that congressional hearings were held to explore how the news media cover rape cases.64 One of the main concerns about the media’s coverage was that a local television show had disclosed the victim’s name—which the media rarely does in rape cases. This disclosure was disastrous: the victim was so distraught that she moved to Florida and later died in a car crash thought to be a suicide.65

Crime victims’ needs for support and understanding often conflict with the goals of news organizations. News organizations know that crime is a very important news topic and that the public is particularly interested in violent and high-profile crimes. Homicide, rape, and assault are priority news topics, and reporters are expected to cover incidents as soon as possible following an incident.66 The problem from the perspective of crime victims is that reporters will contact them while they are experiencing the immediate emotional pain caused by an incident. The National Center for Victims of Crime has been a leader in attempting to educate media personnel about the secondary victimization that can be caused by insensitive questioning and by reporting inappropriate information about crime victims. The center’s focus has been on encouraging the media to balance fairly the public’s right to know with the victim’s right to privacy.

After reading this section, you should be able to
1. describe how victims are affected by crime by summarizing the financial, physical, and psychological/emotional consequences of victimization;
2. analyze sources of secondary victimization and their impact on crime victims.

15.5 VICTIMS’ RIGHTS

In colonial times, crime victims played an active role in the criminal justice system: they were responsible for apprehending and prosecuting offenders.67 This early system of private prosecution was replaced by our current system, in which crimes are defined as actions against the state and not the victim. Until the 1960s, the role of the victim was thus relegated to reporting the crime to the police and testifying if the case went to trial. Crime victims were assets only because they could help achieve arrest and conviction goals, but the specific interests and concerns of the victims were ignored. Victims had no voice in the decisions made about their cases and had no legal rights. In contrast, the Bill of Rights provides protections to the accused at every stage of the criminal justice process. Crime victims were almost irrelevant, and the treatment they received by the system often led to the secondary victimization discussed earlier.
The Victims’ Rights Movement

Movements for social reform from the 1960s to the present have led to new laws, policies, and procedures giving greater consideration to victims and their role in the criminal justice process.

The treatment of crime victims in the criminal justice system became an important reform issue in the 1970s. Several events were key to the emergence of victims’ rights. First, the 1960s brought general concern about individual rights in many arenas, including civil rights, women’s rights, inmate rights, gay rights, and students’ rights. The women’s rights movement was a particularly strong supporter of victims’ rights, because its agenda included addressing the harms caused by the way the criminal justice system processed rape cases and refused to process domestic violence cases. Second, several government initiatives increased awareness and provided financial support for victim-assistance programs. Results from the NCVS helped raise awareness of the harms caused by crime and documented the large number of victims who do not report their victimization to the police. The Law Enforcement Assistance Administration provided funds to support innovative programs to reduce crime and provided research to evaluate the impact of these programs. Third, the number of victims’ rights organizations increased dramatically, and national coordinating bodies such as the National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA) were founded.

NOVA was founded in 1976, and its accomplishments include assisting in passing the 1984 Victims of Crime Act and the 1982 Victim and Witness Protection Act, both of which provide counseling, information, referrals, and direct assistance to crime victims, and support and training to victim advocates. President Ronald Reagan adopted victims’ rights as one of his priority domestic policy issues. He declared the first National Victims of Crime Week in 1981 and convened the President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime in 1982. This task force made more than sixty recommendations for new legislation to be enacted to protect the rights and interests of crime victims in the criminal justice system. These factors melded together to help stimulate concern for crime victims and have since evolved into the victims’ rights movement.

The President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime

The President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime, which issued its final report in December 1982, described many problems with the treatment of crime victims in the criminal justice system. For example, the task force walked a hypothetical victim through the stages of the criminal justice process and highlighted the concerns of crime victims:

You [the victim] reflect on how you and your victimizer are treated by the system that is called justice. You are aware of inequities that are more than merely procedural. During trial and after sentencing the defendant had a free lawyer; he was fed and housed; given physical and psychiatric treatment, job training, education, support for his family, counsel on appeal. Although you do not oppose any of these safeguards, you realize that you have helped to pay for all these benefits for the criminal. Now, in addition and by yourself, you must try to repair all that his crime has destroyed; and what you cannot repair you must endure.

The victims’ rights movement has had tremendous success. Almost all the legislative initiatives proposed by the 1982 President’s Task Force have been enacted. All fifty states have passed a crime victims’ bill of rights attempting to ensure that victims are treated with dignity and compassion, are informed...
about the decisions made on their case, and are able to participate in the
decision making. Twenty-nine states have amended their constitutions to
focus on the rights of crime victims. Several federal laws have also been
passed. In 1982, the federal Victim and Witness Protection Act established
policies and procedures on how federal officials should treat crime victims
and also served as a national model for state legislation. The Crime Control
Act of 1990 created the first federal bill of rights for crime victims. In 1994,
the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act focused on improving
the treatment of rape, domestic violence, child abuse, and fraud victims.71

THE ISSUE OF CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

The task force also made numerous recommendations for criminal justice
reforms. The most controversial proposal was to amend the Sixth Amend-
ment of the Constitution of the United States to specifically focus on the needs
of crime victims. Strong arguments for and against such an amendment have
been debated for many years. Numerous states have amended their constitu-
tions, but Congress has resisted amending the U.S. Constitution.

Proposed Changes to the Sixth Amendment

The following key sections of the proposed amendment identify the constitu-
tional protections that would be provided to crime victims:

SECTION 1. The rights of victims of violent crime, being capable of protection
without denying the constitutional rights of those accused of victimizing
them, are hereby established and shall not be denied by any State or the
United States and may be restricted only as provided in this article.

SECTION 2. A victim of violent crime shall have the right to reasonable and
timely notice of any public proceeding involving the crime and of any release
or escape of the accused; the rights not to be excluded from such public pro-
ceeding and reasonably to be heard at public release, plea, sentencing,
reprieve, and pardon proceedings; and the right to adjudicative decisions
that duly consider the victim’s safety, interest in avoiding unreasonable
delay, and just and timely claims to restitution from the offender. These
rights shall not be restricted except when and to the degree dictated by a
substantial interest in public safety or the administration of criminal justice,
or by compelling necessity.

Source: National Victims’ Constitutional Amendment Network. 2002. Downloaded from the
WWW at www.nvcan.org.

There are several arguments in support of a constitutional amendment.72
First, proponents argue that crime victims have no federal constitutional
rights and that providing this amendment would better balance justice in
the criminal justice system. Proponents argue that defendants have a sub-
stantial number of constitutional rights, such as the right to counsel, protec-
tion against self-incrimination, and the right to confront witnesses. The
focus of the amendment would not take away such rights but provide more
rights to crime victims. Second, adopting the amendment would help to
mitigate the psychological harm suffered by crime victims. Proponents
describe the secondary victimization that often occurs because of poor treat-
ment by criminal justice professionals. The amendment would help ensure
that these professionals treat victims with dignity and respect. Third, the constitutional amendment would improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. The cooperation of victims is critical for making arrests and convicting offenders. When victims refuse to report crimes or do not want to cooperate with prosecutors, offenders often go free. Proponents argue that the amendment would increase victims’ willingness to cooperate.

People who are against the amendment highlight several problems. First, they argue that a constitutional amendment is not necessary. They cite the fact that thousands of pieces of legislation have already been passed across the country. Opponents of the amendment also argue that victims can receive additional support and remedies by bringing suit in the civil justice system. Second, opponents argue that victim involvement would disrupt criminal justice proceedings. They argue that victims often change their minds because they are unsure what they want from the system. Such uncertainty would only slow an already time-consuming process. Finally, opponents argue that substantial resources would have to be expended in order to enforce the amendment, and litigation initiated by crime victims would clog an already overwhelmed court system.

The legislation passed to assist crime victims appears to have improved their treatment by the criminal justice system. For example, recently published research comparing the treatment of victims in states with strong legal protections compared to states with weak legal protections indicates significant differences for victims. Victims in the “strong legal protection” states were more likely to receive notification about the status of their cases at several stages and notification of their rights and the services available to them. Victims in these states also were more likely to exercise their rights at some stages and generally had more favorable attitudes about the criminal justice system. However, judges in strong-protection states were actually less likely to order that restitution be paid to victims, compared to judges in the weak-protection states.

**Monetary Reimbursement**

*As a result of victims’ rights legislation, monetary reimbursements are made to crime victims through state victim compensation programs and court-mandated restitution programs.*

There are a number of ways for crime victims to be reimbursed for losses resulting from victimization. Some victims may be eligible for reimbursement by a compensation fund administered by state governments. If convicted, the offender’s punishment may include the requirement to pay restitution directly to the victim. Also, crime victims can sue the offender and other third parties to recoup money for the financial and emotional hardships caused by the crime.

**Victim Compensation**

A type of program providing opportunity for victims to receive money from state funds for expenses they incur as a result of being victimized by violent crime.
grams generally do not cover property losses, however. States set the maximum benefit that crime victims can receive in amounts that range between $10,000 and $25,000. Crime victims must report their crime to the police, apply for compensation within a year, and cooperate with prosecutors to be eligible for compensation. However, the offender does not have to be arrested or convicted for the victim to receive these funds.

The first compensation program in the United States was implemented in California in 1965. Other states, such as New York, Massachusetts, and Hawaii, adopted programs soon after California, and the number of states adopting similar programs has since steadily grown. By 1983, thirty-two states had compensation programs, and by 1990, forty-eight states had such programs. Today, all states, Washington, DC, and the Virgin Islands have a state-funded compensation package available to crime victims. These programs distribute a large amount of financial aid to victims. The number of compensation claims increased dramatically between 1980 and 1992, and more than 100,000 victims received approximately $240 million in 1996. On average, victims applying for compensation receive about $2,000.

Compensation programs are partially supported by the federal government. In 1984, the Victims of Crime Act established a Crime Victims Fund. This fund reimburses states for approximately 40 percent of the compensation payments made to crime victims. To qualify for federal funding, states must do the following in administering their compensation programs:

- Cover medical expenses, mental health counseling, lost wages, funeral expenses, and loss of support for homicide survivors
- Compensate drunk driving and domestic violence victims and not categorically exclude domestic violence victims related to or living with the offender
- Compensate for crimes to both in-state and out-of-state residents
- Comply with statistical reporting requirements

There are several problems with the administration of state compensation programs. First, many victims are not eligible to receive state assistance, and the amounts received cover only a portion of the losses incurred by some victims. For example, victims are not eligible to recoup the costs for crime scene cleanup, and sexual assault victims cannot receive funds to replace clothing. Second, crime victims must know that compensation programs exist and must be willing to cooperate with the police and prosecution to receive funds. Research indicates that many victims of violent crime never apply for assistance even though they are eligible. One study found that only 6 percent of violent-crime victims request compensation, and only approximately 4 percent actually receive it. Most victims do not apply, because they are not even aware they are eligible. Third, there are often long delays between the time the victim applies for assistance and the time funds are actually received. Some victims may wait more than a year to receive compensation funds after filing a claim.

**Restitution Programs**

Another type of monetary reimbursement to crime victims is restitution. **Restitution** is a court-ordered payment to the victim by the convicted offender for losses suffered as a result of a crime. Restitution may also include providing services to the community. It is typically included as part of the sentence.
of a sentence given by the court. For example, an offender convicted of burglary might be given a five-year probation sentence but also be ordered to reimburse the victim with restitution for losses and expenses. Some judges may also order community restitution, in which the offender completes community-service activities.

Legal codes of many ancient civilizations, including the Code of Hammurabi and early Mosaic law, include references to restitution. Restitution was also a popular sanction historically in America. During the colonial period, restitution was the basic penalty for property offenses such as theft. The use of restitution as a sanction declined rapidly in the late eighteenth century as an increasing number of prisons were built and the role of the victim in the criminal justice system was limited to participation only as the complaining witness. Although modern-day ideas about restitution started to take shape in the 1930s and several innovative programs were implemented in the 1960s, most offenders did not pay restitution until the victims’ rights movement and the President’s Task Force helped to reestablish it as a priority.

The Victim and Witness Protection Act, passed in 1982, required federal judges to either order full restitution to the victim or state why they did not do so in the court record. By 1990, every state had either amended or enacted statutes that authorized courts to require restitution be paid to crime victims, and the number and amount of restitution awards provided to crime victims has grown dramatically.

Restitution offers several advantages compared to other forms of monetary compensation for crime victims. The payment holds the offender directly accountable for the financial effects suffered by the victim. Restitution can be ordered for both property and violent crimes, there are no limitations on the amount that can be ordered, and it is the responsibility of the system, not the victim, to pursue it. Since many crime victims simply want the offender to take responsibility for the crime and to receive reimbursement for their losses, restitution is considered a legitimate alternative to incarceration. The costs of administering restitution are minimal, offenders reimburse the victim directly, and victims are more satisfied with the criminal justice system when the offender pays restitution to the victim.

Although restitution has clear benefits for the victim, there are a number of problems in relying on it as a reimbursement for victims. The recovery of financial losses by restitution depends on the criminal justice system’s ability to apprehend and convict the offenders. Since many crimes are not solved, many victims cannot receive restitution. In addition, many offenders who are convicted may be unable to pay crime victims. Most offenders are poor and lack financial means to meet the court-ordered payment amount. Research that examines the use of restitution in the criminal justice system finds that judges often do not order restitution, and even if it is ordered, offenders do not make payments to the victim over half of the time.

**Civil Remedies**

*For a crime victim seeking damages, suing the offender in civil court is a useful alternative to compensation and restitution through the criminal courts.*

Since compensation and restitution have limitations, crime victims are increasingly relying on civil litigation as another way to help them recover from the harms caused by crime. Victims have used civil remedies—civil court processes to recover from the psychological, financial, emotional, and physical harms of crime. Civil suits are particularly empowering because crime victims directly control the outcome of the case. The victim decides to
pursue a civil action against the offender or third party, works directly with
the attorney to prove liability, and chooses to accept or reject a settlement
offer. The goal of these civil suits is to help victims work through the trauma
caused by crimes, recover expenses from crimes, and restore confidence in
their ability to control their own destiny.91

Civil suits are also desirable for many victims because the legal rules and
procedures of civil courts are less concerned than the criminal courts with
protecting offenders’ rights. Unlike what occurs in a criminal trial, offenders
must testify in civil court if requested to do so, the rules of evidence are
more flexible, and prior criminal convictions are admissible.92 The burden of
proof at a criminal trial is “beyond a reasonable doubt,” but in a civil pro-
ceeding the burden is a less stringent “preponderance of evidence” standard.
A good example of how this burden-of-proof difference affects case out-
comes is the O. J. Simpson case. Simpson was acquitted at his criminal trial
in 1995 for the murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman.
However, the victims’ families brought a civil action against him, and he was
found liable for damages. The families were awarded a $33.5 million civil
judgment.93

An additional benefit of civil remedies is that such litigation may help to
prevent crime.94 Crime victims not only can sue offenders for damages but
also can bring suits against third parties involved. Universities, hotels,
restaurants, shopping malls, and office buildings can be sued for their failure
to protect victims because of failures in security and negligence. One of the
groundbreaking cases in this area was decided in 1974. Connie Francis, a
well-known and successful singer, was assaulted and raped in her motel
room. Although the motel had received several complaints about defective
locks and other security problems, it had not responded to these concerns.
Francis’s rapist was never caught, but she won a settlement of $2.5 million
from the motel chain for the security failures.95 The number of civil suits
brought against third parties has increased significantly in the last twenty-
five years. Not only do these other parties have “deeper pockets,” but also
the lawsuits encourage them to enhance safety and security measures in
their businesses.96

Victim-Participation Programs

Victims participate in decisions made by the criminal justice system through
victim-impact statements and also participate in reconciliation encounters with
their offenders.

Another important area of victims’ rights is increasing victims’ participation
in the decisions made by the criminal justice system. Some of these changes
focus primarily on providing direct assistance to crime victims. Such reforms
include establishing secure waiting rooms in courthouses, intimidation
statutes, civil protection orders, and a victim advocates office. Other reforms
focus on changing the role of the victim in the criminal justice process.
These reforms include allowing victims to provide victim-impact statements
at sentencing and parole hearings and encouraging victim participation in
mediation and reconciliation programs.

Victim-Impact Statements

A common participatory reform implemented since the President’s Task
Force issued its report is victim-impact statements.97 Impact statements
give crime victims the opportunity to describe the financial, physical, and
emotional harms caused by the crime. A victim-impact statement typically is
taken by a probation officer, who then includes the statement or a summary of it in the presentence investigation report. In some states, victims are allowed to give an oral statement at the offender’s sentencing hearing. The primary objective of these statements is for judges to consider the harm caused by crime when making the final sentencing decision. Many states also allow a similar type of statement to be made at parole hearings.

The United States Supreme Court has considered whether the use of victim-impact statements is constitutional in several landmark cases. In Booth v. Maryland, decided in 1987, the Supreme Court held that the Eighth Amendment prohibits victim-impact statements in capital murder cases. The Court stated that the jury should be focused on the defendant, and such statements would strongly influence the decisions made by juries. The Court ruled that such statements “create a constitutionally unacceptable risk that the jury may impose the death penalty in an arbitrary and capricious manner.”98 The Court reversed its opinion on victim-impact statements, however, in Payne v. Tennessee, in 1991. Pervis Payne had been convicted of murdering Charisse Christopher and one of her children. Another child was stabbed, but he survived. Payne was convicted of the murders. During the penalty phase of his capital case, the grandmother gave a victim-impact statement describing her and the surviving child’s pain and suffering. The jury sentenced Payne to death. The Supreme Court decided to overturn the decision it had made in Booth, ruling that victim-impact statements are constitutional. The Court reasoned that harm caused by the offender is relevant for assessing blameworthiness.99

Several research studies have evaluated the use of impact statements during the criminal justice process. Research indicates that crime victims are more satisfied with court processes when they are allowed to give an impact statement. For example, in a 1998 study, 67 percent of victims who gave a victim-impact statement were satisfied with prosecutors, but only 18 percent of those who did not give one were satisfied.100 Other research indicates that defense attorneys rarely object to allowing victims to provide an impact statement, that these statements are not inaccurate or exaggerated, and that victims typically discuss financial and not emotional matters.101 Victim-impact statements also do not lead to harsher sentences by judges. The seriousness of the offense and the prior criminal record of the offender primarily influence sentencing decisions.102

**Mediation and Victim-Offender Reconciliation**

The basic premise of *mediation and reconciliation* programs is that crime is first a harm to an individual, and the state is a secondary victim.103 These programs really capture the essence of the victims’ rights movement. A crime victim meets with the offender in the presence of a trained mediator or facilitator. Family members of the victim and offender, as well as community members, may also be present during this meeting. The session provides an opportunity for the victim to describe the suffering caused by the crime, to ask questions about why the offender did it, and to request that certain elements be included in the disposition agreement.104 The offender is held accountable, because he or she usually is asked to apologize to the victim and is ordered to pay restitution. The victim is also empowered because he or she has a direct voice in the proceedings.

Only a few programs of this type existed in the United States in the mid- to late 1970s, but today there are more than 120 programs.105 Mediation and reconciliation are typically used as diversionary programs. That is, instead of being processed by the criminal justice system, the victim and
offender agree to meet with the mediator. This type of diversionary program is used to process only a small number of cases. Offenders typically do not have extensive records, and many programs only allow juvenile offenders to participate. Although some locations have experimented with mediation or reconciliation for violent offenders, most offenders have committed misdemeanors or property offenses.

Crime victims are generally very satisfied with the mediation process and the outcomes achieved during these meetings. One study found that 93 percent of the sessions ended successfully with a restitution agreement, and 85 percent of offenders and victims were satisfied with the mediation process. Victims interviewed after participating in a mediation session generally felt that the meeting, the mediator, and the disposition were fair. Victims also reported being less fearful of crime after participating in one of these meetings. Offenders also benefit. Research indicates that offenders who participate in these programs are significantly less likely to recidivate compared to offenders processed by the criminal justice system. One study found that only 22 percent of juvenile offenders who participated in mediation programs recidivated within a one-year time frame, compared to 34 percent who participated in a court-administered program.

**After reading this section, you should be able to**

1. explain why the rights of crime victims in the criminal justice system were ignored for most of American history;
2. identify the forces that contributed to legislation that improved the treatment of crime victims;
3. describe the kinds of laws, policies, and procedures that have been implemented to better protect the rights of crime victims;
4. argue for or against changing the Sixth Amendment of the United States Constitution to address victims’ rights;
5. evaluate the following achievements of the victims’ rights movement: monetary reimbursement, civil remedies, and victim-participation programs

**15.6 SUMMARY**

In contrast to criminology and criminal justice research that focuses almost exclusively on criminal offenders and patterns of crime, victimology is concerned with understanding the patterns and consequences of criminal victimization and with those people who are victimized. That is, victimology is victim-centered rather than offender-centered. Most of what we know about criminal victimization in the United States has been learned from the National Crime Victimization Survey. The NCVS complements the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report program by bringing to light victimizations not reported to police (pp. 453–456).

Most criminal victimizations are nonviolent property offenses. In general, the United States has experienced a significant decline in criminal victimization in recent times, for both property and violent offenses. Observers who study these trends are working to understand them (pp. 456–458).

Criminal victimization is concentrated among certain social groups in American society. By and large, those segments of the population that already experience great social and economic disadvantage also suffer the greatest risk of criminal victimization. Racial minorities, the poor, and the young bear the greatest burden when it comes to being victims of crime, particularly...
violent crime. Women stand the greatest risk of sexual victimization. Those with the most material wealth tend to experience the highest rates of property victimization (pp. 458–463).

Quite often, the distinction between “victim” and “offender” is little more than happenstance, particularly in the case of violent altercations, with the loser becoming the “victim” and the winner becoming the “offender.” Victim-precipitation theories explain victimization by examining the interaction between both parties to a dispute. These theories see the victim as, instead of a passive recipient of the victimization, an empowered, active agent in the interaction. Lifestyle theories, in contrast, do not emphasize the microlevel dynamics of interpersonal interaction. Instead, lifestyle theories attend to victims’ patterns of social activity in order to ascertain which activities and associations enhance exposure to high-risk situations. Routine activities theory shifts the focus from the victim back to the offender by highlighting the circumstances in which crime occurs. However, in contrast to many criminological theories, which are largely offender-based and quite deterministic, potential victims of crime are empowered in routine activities approaches through their ability to alter the cost-benefit analysis of criminals (pp. 463–476).

Despite efforts to better document the extent of criminal victimization, most available data sources fail to capture the impact—financial, physical, and psychological—of victimization. Tremendous costs are incurred by victims of crime. Recent estimates place the total financial costs at $1,800 per person per year. Beyond the cold monetary costs associated with personal victimization are the physical and psychological effects suffered. The trauma of violent crime in particular exacts severe psychological consequences for victims, in that they are often unable to come to terms with the events that took place. They are beset with fear and anxiety, sometimes so severe that medical treatment is required (pp. 476–479).

Tragically, all too often crime victims are victimized again, this time by the state, and even by family and friends who are unaware of their needs or just unsympathetic to them. The victims’ rights movement was a response to this “secondary victimization” that sought to rectify some of the deficiencies of the criminal justice system so that victims no longer had to suffer further indignities at the hands of those whose mandate is to aid them in their time of need. To address these concerns, state and local lawmakers set out to provide crime victims with expanded procedural rights, legal assistance, personal advocacy, financial aid, and, most significantly, an enhanced participatory role in the justice process (pp. 479–484).

Several innovations emerged out of the victims’ rights movement. All states now provide monetary reimbursements for victims of violent crime. In recent years, numerous jurisdictions, both large and small, have turned to victim-offender mediation and reconciliation programs in an attempt to give victims more power and control over the justice meted out in their name. Victims who are not satisfied with these traditional and nontraditional procedures in the criminal justice system can also turn to the civil justice system to exact some measure of recompense from those who victimized them (pp. 484–489).
CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

- Define victimology.
- Compare and contrast sources of data used to estimate the incidence and prevalence of victimization in the United States.
- Evaluate the accuracy and uses of the National Crime Victimization Survey.
- Describe patterns and trends in victimization in the United States over the past thirty years.
- Summarize the most common demographic characteristics of crime victims.
- Summarize the most common situational characteristics that influence who becomes a victim of crime.
- Describe common patterns of interpersonal dynamics in most violent victimizations.
- Identify three major types of theories that attempt to explain the causes of victimization.
- Explain how a victimization can be analyzed as a social interaction and as a situated transaction.
- Contrast victim-precipitation theories with victim-provocation theories as explanations for victimization in intimate partner homicides.
- Compare and contrast victim-precipitation with lifestyle theories of victimization.
- Explain why victims and offenders share essentially the same characteristics.
- Compare and contrast lifestyle theories and routine activities theory.
- Give examples of the roles of differential association and differential opportunity in instances of violent crime.
- Explain the rational choice theory of crime.
- Give examples of how each theory described in this chapter could be applied to prevent or reduce victimization.
- Describe how victims are affected by crime by summarizing the financial, physical, and psychological/emotional consequences of victimization.
- Analyze sources of secondary victimization and their impact on crime victims.
- Explain why the rights of crime victims in the criminal justice system were ignored for most of American history.
- Identify the forces that contributed to legislation that improved the treatment of crime victims.
- Describe the kinds of laws, policies, and procedures that have been implemented to better protect the rights of crime victims.
- Argue for or against changing the Sixth Amendment of the United States Constitution to address victims' rights.
- Evaluate the following achievements of the victims' rights movement: monetary reimbursement, civil remedies, and victim-participation programs.

KEY TERMS

- Civil remedies (486)
- Complex posttraumatic stress disorder (479)
- Differential association (469)
- Differential opportunities (473)
- Guardianship (475)
- Lifestyle theories (463)
- Mediation and reconciliation (488)
- National Center for Victims of Crime (481)
- National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) (454)
- National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA) (482)
- Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (478)
- Predatory crime (473)
- Rational choice theory (475)
- Restitution (485)
- Routine activities theory (473)
- Secondary victimization (479)
- Situated transaction (465)
- Symbolic interactionism (465)
- Target hardening (475)
- Theory of personal victimization (468)
- Victim compensation (484)
- Victim precipitation (464)
- Victim provocation (465)
- Victim-impact statement (487)
- Victim-precipitation theories (463)
- Victimology (453)
- Victims' rights movement (482)
SELF-TEST
SHORT ANSWER

1. Define victimology.
2. List the goals of the NCVS.
3. Summarize four demographic characteristics of criminal victimization.
4. Summarize four situational characteristics of victimization.
5. Describe von Hentig’s contribution to victimology.
6. Define victim precipitation as a theory of victimization.

7. Describe lifestyle theory as an explanation for victimization.
8. Explain the role of differential association in lifestyle theory.
10. Define predatory crime.
11. State the assumption about human behavior that underlies rational choice theory.

13. Name the key legislation that was passed as a result of the victims’ rights movement.
14. Identify three ways that victims can recover from financial harms.
15. Give two examples of victim-participation programs.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

1. The NCVS measures all of the following factors except except
   a. month, time, and place that victimization occurred
   b. offenders’ prior arrests
   c. relationship between victim and offender
   d. whether crime was reported to the police

2. The NCVS is especially valuable in determining the incidence of
   a. unreported victimizations
   b. crimes against persons and property
   c. rape, sexual assault, and family violence
   d. a and c

3. People who are disproportionately likely to be perpetrators and victims of crime include all the following except
   a. youths aged 16–19
   b. males, other than in cases of sexual assault
   c. Native Americans
   d. people with household incomes between $7,500 and $14,999

4. In which of the following situations does most victimization of adults not occur?
   a. At night
   b. With firearms
   c. In public places
   d. In urban areas

5. Most victims of sexual assault or rape
   a. know their attacker
   b. are single or divorced
   c. are 12 to 24 years of age
   d. all of the above

6. According to Sutherland,
   a. crime victims are an important subject of study
   b. criminology is the study of crime as a social phenomenon
   c. victimology is an important branch of criminology
   d. a and c

7. According to von Hentig, criminal events
   a. can be understood as encounters in which the offender is actively and the victim passively involved
   b. show that victims are the direct cause of their victimization
   c. are like plays with offenders and victims as actors
   d. are dynamic social interactions in which both offenders and victims contribute to the outcomes

8. Which of the following theories best explains intimate partner homicides when the offender is an abused victim of the target?
   a. Victim-precipitation theory
   b. Theory of personal victimization
   c. Lifestyle theory
   d. Rational choice theory

9. Lifestyle theory explains personal victimization as an outgrowth of
   a. the interpersonal dynamics between victim and offender
   b. exposure to opportunities for crime
   c. a victim’s high-risk behavior patterns and associations
   d. people’s choices in their efforts to maximize satisfactions and minimize risks
10. Routine activities theory explains causes of victimization as
   a. the interpersonal dynamics between victim and offender
   b. differential opportunities for crime
   c. an offender’s choice to risk negative consequences
   d. b and c
11. Predatory crime requires the presence of all the following variables except
   a. a likely offender
   b. a suitable target
   c. potential guardians
   d. a social space where a crime can occur
12. Costs of victimization primarily include
   a. $1,800 per victim
   b. pain and suffering
   c. loss of property and income
   d. b and c
13. According to Widom, there is a cycle of violence in which
   a. victimization leads to low self-esteem
   b. complex posttraumatic stress disorder leads to personality changes
   c. abused children are more likely to become violent offenders as adults
   d. the more serious the crime, the stronger and longer the victim’s reaction

14. The victims’ rights movement
   a. led to a constitutional amendment protecting victims’ rights
   b. opposed the recommendations of the President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime
   c. helped establish victim compensation and restitution programs
   d. inspired all the states to amend their constitutions to give victims rights

15. A victim’s right to sue his or her offender to recover monetary damages is an example of
   a. a civil remedy
   b. court-ordered restitution
   c. state-based compensation
   d. a victim-participation program

**TRUE–FALSE**

T F 1. Most victimization involves violent crimes against persons.
T F 2. According to UCR and NCVS data, the rate of victimization has steadily increased over the past two decades.
T F 3. The NCVS revealed a much lower rate of sexual assault and rape than expected.
T F 4. Victims and offenders of violent crimes most often are of the same race.
T F 5. In violent crimes, the victim and the offender usually know each other.
T F 6. Most crimes are committed in the presence of third parties.
T F 7. Felson and Messner’s research on intimate partner homicides does not support the victim-precipitation theory.
T F 8. Routine activities theory focuses solely on offenders rather than victims.
T F 9. The victims’ rights movement has remained largely unsuccessful.
T F 10. A person’s lifestyle predicts the chances of exposure to criminogenic situations.
T F 11. Victims and offenders typically do not share many lifestyle characteristics.
T F 12. Routine activities theory focuses on offenders’ opportunities to commit crimes.
T F 13. Changes in U.S. society since the 1950s decreased targets for predatory crime and increased social controls to guard against crime.
T F 14. The criminal justice system and the news media often increase the effects of victimization.
T F 15. Mediation and reconciliation typically is used in diversionary programs for nonviolent offenders.
FILL-IN

1. A ____________ is an act involving direct physical contact between an offender and a victim or object that the offender attempts to take or damage.

2. In ____________, institutions and individuals react inappropriately to a victim, furthering the harm inflicted by a crime.

3. In Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo’s theory, ____________ refers to routine daily vocational and leisure activities.

4. Making the costs or risks greater than the benefits of committing a crime to reduce victimizations is called ____________.

5. ____________ is a court-ordered payment to the victim by the convicted offender for losses suffered as a result of the crime. It may also require the offender to provide services to the community.

6. In routine activities theory, ____________ refers to social controls and situations that act to prevent crime, such as the presence of potential witnesses.

7. In lifestyle theory, the people who influence an individual’s exposure to high-risk situations are referred to as ____________.

8. According to Luckenbill, the interaction between an offender and a victim that leads to homicide is called a ____________.

9. Victim ____________, in which victims are the primary cause of their victimization, has been criticized as a form of victim blaming.

10. Becoming a victim of theft by leaving your laptop or cell phone unattended in a public place is an example of victim ____________.

11. The chief instrument for gathering information about victims and the “dark figure of crime” is the ____________.

12. ____________ is the study of victims and patterns of victimization.

13. Victim-participation tools in which victims get to have their say in court or at a parole hearing are called ____________.

14. In routine activities theory, the offender’s choices are based on ____________ for committing a crime.

15. Advocacy, legal initiatives, and support organizations for victims developed during the past several decades are collectively referred to as the ____________.

MATCHING

1. Victimology
2. NCS
3. UCR
4. Property crimes
5. Predatory crimes
6. Third-party involvement
7. Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham
8. Lifestyle
9. Hans von Hentig
10. Victim compensation
11. Symbolic interactionism
12. Marvin Wolfgang
13. Richard Felson and Steven Messner
14. Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson
15. Payne v. Tennessee

A. Developed the routine activities theory of victimization
B. Brought the concept of victim provocation into the mainstream of criminological thought
C. Theoretical perspective that views victimizations as ad-lib dramatic performances
D. First developed rational choice theory
E. Data-gathering tool for offenses reported to the police and offender characteristics
F. Permitted victim-impact statements in court
G. Theory of victimization developed by Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo
H. Monetary reimbursement to victims through state and federally funded programs
I. Found victim precipitation to be a factor in a significant percentage of intimate partner homicides, in that male partners were likely to have had histories of prior violence
J. Study of victims and victimization
K. Crimes in which an offender acts with intent to take or damage a person or object
L. Presence of one or more witnesses to a victimization
M. First examined the role of victims and interactions between victims and offenders
N. First data-gathering tool for victim reports about crime incidents
O. The most common type of victimization
ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. How is victimology different from traditional criminology? Why is victimology a new field of study today?
2. Is victimization a consequence of victim behavior? What theorists and theoretical perspectives in victimology address this question? Which types of victimization and crime situations make the best cases for this claim?
3. How can it be said that criminal offenders and crime victims share the same characteristics? What do NCVS data say about criminal and victim demographics and situational characteristics? How does lifestyle theory attempt to explain victimization as a consequence of these characteristics?
4. What are the elements of the theory of personal victimization put forth by Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo? How can this theory be applied in preventing victimization?
5. How do Cohen and Felson explain predatory victimization in terms of routine activities, differential opportunities, and guardianship? How does rational choice enter into the equation?
6. What are the consequences of victimization? What are some legislative initiatives that have been enacted to respect victims’ rights?