

# **THE VITAL ROLE OF VICTIMOLOGY IN THE REHABILITATION OF OFFENDERS AND THEIR REINTEGRATION INTO SOCIETY**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

This paper is about a relatively new and not very well known discipline called victimology. The logical starting point is to see what victimology is all about, to briefly trace its beginnings, its historical evolution, and its present state. I will address three major questions that are highly relevant to the subject-matter of this training course. These are:

- (1) Why is a good knowledge of victimology indispensable for better understanding the offender and the offence?
- (2) Why is a good knowledge of victimology absolutely essential for positively changing offenders' attitudes and behaviour?
- (3) What new and exciting possibilities does victimology offer for the rehabilitation of offenders and their successful reintegration into society?

Victimology is a very young discipline, much younger than its parent discipline: criminology. Victimology is only fifty years old but it is neither a fad nor a fashion, it is a scientific reality that has imposed and affirmed itself. Its impact on, and its contribution to, criminology have been significant. Victimological research fills an enormous gap in our knowledge about the phenomenon of crime. It satisfies a need deeply felt by researchers and practitioners

alike for factual and systematic information about crime victims. It goes without saying that the study and the understanding of the phenomenon of crime will never be complete unless the victims are included in the explanatory models. No valid theory of criminal behaviour can afford to ignore the victim. To try to do so would be an attempt to explain a dynamic and interactionist form of human behaviour in a unilateral, uni-dimensional and static manner. This is why the study of the victim is, and will always remain, an integral part of criminology.

## **II. WHAT IS VICTIMOLOGY?**

If criminology is the science of crime and criminal behaviour then, for the sake of simplification, we can say that victimology is the science of victims and victimization. Theoretical victimology is the study of crime victims, their characteristics, their relationship to, and their interactions, with their victimizers, their role, and their actual contribution to the genesis of the crime. It is also the study of the impact of crime on victims, in particular, the traumatic effects of victimization, victims' response to victimization, and the coping mechanisms they use for healing and recovery. Applied victimology is the application of knowledge acquired from the study and research on victims and victimization in practice to help and assist those victimized by crime and prevent victimization.

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### III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF VICTIMOLOGY

Early victimological notions were developed not by criminologist or sociologist but by poets, writers and novelists. The first systematic treatment of victims of crime appeared in 1948 in Hans von Hentig's book 'The Criminal and His Victim'. In the fourth part of the book, under the provocative title 'the Victim's Contribution to the Genesis of the Crime,' von Hentig criticized the static unidimensional study of the offender which had dominated criminology and suggested in its place a new dynamic and dyadic approach that pays equal attention to the criminal and the victim. Von Hentig had earlier treated the topic in a paper published in the Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology in 1940. In it, he noted that:

*It is true, there are many criminal deeds with little or no contribution on the part of the injured individual. ...On the other hand, we can frequently observe a real mutuality in the connection of perpetrator and victim, killer and killed, dupe and duped. Although this reciprocal operation is one of the most curious phenomena of criminal life, it has escaped the attention of socio-pathology.*

In his book, von Hentig (1948:438) is critical of the legal distinction between offenders and victims and the criteria used by the criminal law to make such attributions:

*Most crimes are directed against a specific individual, his life or property, his sexual self-determination. For practical reasons, the final open manifestation of human motor force which precedes a socially*

*undesirable result is designated as the criminal act, and the actor as the responsible criminal. The various degrees and levels of stimulation or response, the intricate play of interacting forces, is scarcely taken into consideration in our legal distinctions, which must be simple and workable.*

Elsewhere von Hentig points out that:

*The law considers certain results and the final moves which lead to them. Here it makes a clear-cut distinction between the one who does, and the one who suffers. Looking into the genesis of the situation, in a considerable number of cases, we meet a victim who consents tacitly, co-operates, conspires or provokes. The victim is one of the causative elements. (p.436)*

Von Hentig insisted that many crime victims contribute to their own victimization, be it by inciting or provoking the criminal or by creating or fostering a situation likely to lead to the commission of the crime. Other pioneers in victimology, who firmly believed that victims may consciously or unconsciously play a casual role, outlined many of the forms this contribution can take: negligence, carelessness, recklessness, imprudence, and so forth. They pointed out that the victim's role could be a motivational one (attracting, arousing, inducing, inciting) or a functional one (provoking, precipitating, triggering, facilitating, participating) (Fattah, 1991).

Von Hentig's book was followed by a number of theoretical studies that dealt with victim types, victim-offender relationships, and the role victims play in certain kinds of crime. The book also provided an impetus for several empirical studies that devoted special attention to the

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victims of specific offences.

The term victimology was coined in 1949 by an American psychiatrist, Frederick Wertham, who used it for the first time in his book 'The Show of Violence'. Wertham wrote:

*The murder victim is the forgotten man. With sensational discussions on the abnormal psychology of the murderer, we have failed to emphasize the unprotectedness of the victim and the complacency of the authorities. One cannot understand the psychology of the murderer if one does not understand the sociology of the victim. What we need is a science victimology. (p.259)*

During the early years of victimology, literature on crime victims remained relatively small when compared to that on criminology. During the 1980's, however, a great spate of important books and articles marked the coming of age of victimology (Rock, 1994). At present, it is fair to maintain that the study of crime victims has become an integral part of criminology.

The need for criminology to thoroughly study the victims of crime may today appear obvious and axiomatic. And it may seem rather surprising that such obvious need has escaped the attention of criminologists for over a century. But it is not rare for social scientists to miss the-obvious. This point is well made by Rock (1994, pxi) who points out:

*Even criminology and the sociology of deviance - disciplines concentrated most squarely on the analysis of crime, criminals and criminal justice - tended somehow to obliterate the victim for a very long while, failing to see what, in retrospect, should*

*probably have been evident all along. Such omissions occur continually. They are an ineluctable part of any discipline, a consequence of the truth marked by Burke when he said that 'a way of seeing is always a way of not seeing.' The price of organizing, specializing and accumulating knowledge about any area is a systematic neglect of the other matters thrown out of focus and beyond the margins. Precisely because criminology is an empirically-driven discipline, it has tended to ignore those things that do not bear the name of crime, criminals and criminal justice.*

#### IV. WHY VICTIMOLOGY

Since the dawn of scientific criminology, criminologists have tried to find out why some individuals become criminals while others do not. They conducted countless studies to discover whether criminals are different in any respect from non-criminals. An equally interesting and thought-provoking question is 'Why do some individuals become victims of crime while others do not?'. Is criminal victimization a random occurrence? Is it due simply to chance factors, misfortune, or bad luck? Do victims of crime constitute a representative sample, an unbiased cross-section of the general population? Do victims of crime differ in any way from non-victims? How do offenders select their targets; how do they pick their victims? There are many other questions for which research is seeking answers. The following are just a few examples:

- (1) Why are certain individuals or groups of individuals more frequently victimized than others? Why are certain targets (individuals, households, businesses, etc) repeatedly

victimized? How can the differential risks and rates of victimization be explained?

- (2) Are certain persons (or targets) more prone and more vulnerable to victimization than others, and if so, why? What is the nature of this proneness; what are the elements of this vulnerability?
- (3) Are there born victims, predestined victims, predisposed victims? Are there recidivist victims? Are there victim stereotypes just as there are criminal stereotypes?
- (4) Are there specific characteristics or specific behaviours that enhance the risks and chances of criminal victimization, that are responsible for, or conducive to, becoming a victim? And if so, what are these characteristics and these behaviours?
- (5) Is there such a thing as victim-invited, victim-induced, victim-precipitated, victim-facilitated criminality? Do some victims promote, provoke, or trigger their own victimization? Do potential victims emit non-verbal signals, signalling their vulnerability to would-be assailants through gestures, posture and movements?

These questions and many others raise a number of issues and research topics that are quite different from those that have been the focus of mainstream criminology. Although the scientific study of the criminal is more than a century old, the systematic study of the victim is still in its infancy. And yet, it seems axiomatic that to analyse the crime phenomenon in its

entirety and in all its complexity, equal attention has to be paid to the criminal and their victim. There are several reasons that render the study of crime victims essential, indeed, indispensable, for a better understanding of the phenomenon of crime (Fattah, 1991):

- (1) Motives for criminal behaviour do not develop in a vacuum (von Hentig, 1948). They come into being through drives and responses, reactions and interactions, attitudes and counter attitudes. In many cases, the victim is involved consciously or unconsciously in the motivational process, as well as in the process, of mental reasoning or rationalization that the criminal engages in prior to the commission of the crime (Fattah, 1976). In some instances, the motives for the criminal act develop around a specific victim. An examination of the place the victim occupies or the role the victim plays in these processes is necessary to understand why the crime was committed and why a particular target was chosen.
- (2) The commission of a crime is the outcome of a process where many factors are at work. In most cases, crime is not an action but a reaction (or an overreaction) to external and environmental stimuli. Some of these stimuli emanate from the victim. The victim is an important element of the environment and of the criminogenic situation.
- (3) Often, the criminal act is not an isolated gesture but the denouement of a long or brief

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interaction with the victim. In such cases, it is not possible to understand the act fully without analysing the chain of interactions that led to its perpetration. It is scientifically unsound to examine and analyse the offender's act in isolation from dynamic forces that have prepared, influenced, conditioned, or determined it, or to dissociate it from the motivational and situational processes that led to its commission.

- (4) Current theories of criminal and deviant behaviour, whether attempting to explain causation or association, offer only static explanations. Since criminal behaviour, like other forms of human behaviour, is dynamic, it can be explained only through a dynamic approach, where the offender, the act, and the victim are inseparable elements of a total situation that conditions the dialectic of the victimizing behaviour (Fattah, 1976).
  - (5) The traits approach, seeking the genesis of criminal behaviour in the characteristics and attributes of the offender, is simplistic. Theories of offenders' attributes, personalities, or social background do not explain why other individuals who have the same traits or personality type or who grow up in identical or very similar conditions do not commit crimes or do not persist in a criminal career. They fail to explain why the offender committed the crime in a particular situation, at a given moment, against a specific victim.
- The traits approach either ignores or deliberately minimizes the importance of situational factors in actualizing or triggering criminal behaviour. The study of victims offers great promise for transforming etiological criminology from the static, one-sided study of the qualities and attributes of the offender into a dynamic, situational approach that views criminal behaviour not as a unilateral action but as the outcome of dynamic processes of interaction.
- (6) As Anttila (1974) points out, the study of the victim has a general informational value. It provides information on the frequency and patterns of victimization, thus making possible the measurement of risk probabilities and the establishment of risk categories (high, low, medium). It also provides valuable information on proneness to victimization, fear of victimization, response to victimization, consequences and impact of victimization. Such knowledge is essential for the formulation of a rational criminal policy, for the evaluation of crime prevention strategies, and for taking social action aimed at protecting vulnerable targets, increasing safety, and improving the quality of life.
  - (7) The victim has a strong impact on criminal justice decisions, particularly those of the police and the courts. In most cases, it is the victim who decides whether or not to mobilize the criminal justice system by reporting or not

- reporting the offence. Furthermore, the characteristics, attitude and behaviour of the victims, and their relationship to the offender, have a significant bearing upon the decision of the police to proceed in a formal or an informal way (see Black, 1970). In the latter case, victim-related factors can greatly affect the final outcome. The study of the victim leads not only to a better understanding of the functioning of the criminal justice system, but also to improving the decision-making process. Enhancing victims' involvement in the process and establishing the modalities of such involvement require a better understanding of the role victims currently play in criminal justice.
- (8) To better fulfil society's obligations to the victims of crime - in order to help, assist, and make the victim whole again - it is necessary to gain a thorough knowledge of the consequences and impact of the crime on those who are victimized. Moreover, an adequate knowledge of the various needs of victims of different types of crime is a prerequisite for setting up efficient victim services, victim assistance, and compensation programs. A better understanding of victims' perceptions of, and attitudes to, the criminal justice system, their reasons for not reporting victimization and refusal or unwillingness to co-operate with the system, are essential to improving attitudes and enhancing co-operation.
- (9) Modern criminology is paying more attention to the concept opportunity (see Mayhew et al., 1976). The commission of many crimes is believed to be largely a function of the opportunities to commit those crimes. Opportunities, in turn, are viewed as being greatly influenced by the behaviour of potential victims. The collective behaviour of potential crime victims may have a strong impact on crime rates, and variations in those rates may be explained, at least partially, through differences or changes in victim behaviour. For this reason, a better understanding of the attitudes and behaviour of victims holds great promise for crime prevention. Victim-based prevention strategies have several advantages over offender-based ones. The former aims at hardening the targets, making the commission of crimes more difficult and less profitable. The role potential victims are called upon to play in this environmental/situational approach is a primary one.
- (10) The medieval paradigm of 'retributive justice' seems to have reached its terminal phase and attempts are already underway to have it replaced by another paradigm of 'restorative justice.' Restorative justice is based on the principles of mediation, conciliation, restitution and compensation. Its primary aim is healing, not punishment. In a restorative justice system, the victim ceases to be a secondary or peripheral player and assumes an active role. He/she becomes a

full party in the process. The study of the impact of victimization on the victim, the attitudes and the needs of the victim are thus essential to a system of restorative justice (Fattah, 1995).

#### **V. THE INADEQUACY OF THE DISPOSITIONAL THEORIES OF CRIMINALITY**

Criminological theories that stress individual traits or offender pathology fail miserably when the task at hand is to explain the temporal and spatial patterns of crime, regional, provincial, intercity and intracity variations in crime rates, or the changes in those rates over time. Theories seeking the genesis of criminal behaviour in the abnormality or the psychopathology of the offender ignore the dynamic forces that determine, condition, shape or influence the offender's behaviour in a given situation. Not only do they fail to explain why many of those who share offenders' abnormal or pathological characteristics do not engage in criminal behaviour, but they also fail to explain why it is that most of those who commit incest or family violence (to give just one example) confine their sexual coercion or aggression strictly within the family and rarely, if ever, are violent or sexually preying against others outside the home. The theories do not fare any better when it comes to explaining retaliatory behaviour committed as a reaction to prior victimization or in response to provocation or precipitation. This is a serious shortcoming because:

(a) Retaliation is a key principle in violence (Felson and Steadman, 1983, p.60; Singer, 1986, pp.61-62) and because violence is, in many cases, situationally determined. In other words, it is the result of events and circumstances that cause a conflict to

escalate (Felson and Steadman, pp.59-60);

(b) A non-negligible part of violence and homicide is victim precipitated (Wolfgang, 1958). In such cases, the violent response is more a function of the precipitating behaviour of the victim and the "situational determinants" (Felson and Steadman, 1983) than it is a function of the characteristics and the background of the respondent.

Another shortcoming of the "positivist" approach is the static way in which it views the personality traits and character attributes believed to be responsible for criminal behaviour. Traits such as aggressiveness, callousness, and dishonesty are neither constant nor absolute and, thus alone have very little, if any, explanatory value. Some individuals become aggressive only when under extreme stress, have consumed alcohol, or when provoked. Others may use violence only when they are humiliated or hurt in their vanity. Some men become violent in situations where they feel the need to assert their maleness. Some people may be shy and withdrawn without peer support, only to become extremely mean when in the presence of, and under pressure from, their peer group. People may be scrupulously honest in one situation and shamelessly dishonest in another. Many "honest" people, whose moral scruples would never allow them to cheat or steal from a friend or neighbour, a work partner, or in general another human being, become totally unscrupulous when it is a matter of cheating the government, a large corporation, or the general public. They could be today without inhibitions or compunction when it comes to committing a white collar crime, such as tax or custom duty evasion, insurance fraud, price fixing, and so forth (Fattah, 1991).

An individual's attitudes to other are not indiscriminate. Clifford Olson, a serial killer found guilty of slaying eleven children in British Columbia, and whom the police suspect of having slain even more, was proven to be a loving husband and affectionate father. Yet he had no sympathy or empathy for the several young victims he brutally killed to satisfy his sexual desires.

In view of all these serious problems and shortcomings, one might wonder why it is that theories of criminals' psychopathology have maintained their popularity for over a hundred years. The answer is rather simple. The attractiveness of the traits/attributes approach lies in its central (though faulty) premise that criminal and delinquents are different from the rest of us. Propagating the view that some individuals are "bad", "evil", or in some way abnormal, allows the average citizen to perceive offenders as distinct individuals, as different beings capable of committing the terrible crimes that we cannot conceive of ourselves as capable of perpetrating. It is a self-assuring approach that allows the dichotomization of people into the good and the bad, the normal and the abnormal, those who are criminally inclined and those not so inclined.

## **VI. THE SHIFT FROM DISPOSITIONAL THEORIES TO SITUATIONAL THEORIES**

Fifty years ago, Sutherland (1947) suggested that explanations deviance and crime are either situational or dispositional, and that of the two, situational explanations might be the more important. Extensive research on violence, vandalism, and other forms of antisocial behaviour led Zimbardo (1978, p157) to challenge the prevailing stereotypes which locate the source of evil in people. He insists that we have been programmed by

our socialization process and basic institutions to accept doctrines of individual guilt, sin, culpability, and failure, as well as to accept the cult of the ego, the strength of character, and the stability of personality. According to Zimbardo, contemporary social psychology maintains that we all overestimate the extent to which behaviour - be it evil, good, or neutral - is dispositionally controlled, while at the same time we systematically underestimate the degree to which it is situationally controlled (p.159).

The manifest and generally acknowledged failure of criminological theories (see above) points to the need for a new, dynamic approach that shifts the focus from predisposing factors to environmental, situational, triggering, and catalytic factors; from the notion of propensities and inclinations to the concept of opportunity. Such a dynamic situational approach pays great attention to the contexts in which violent confrontations occur and analyses these confrontations as situated transactions (Luckenbill, 1977). It maintains that many crimes are situation-specific, context-specific, and target-specific. In contrast to the dispositional perspective which postulates that the impulses for crime come from within the individual and are manifestations of the psychopathology of the offender, the situational approach looks upon criminal behaviour as a response to environmental stimuli, stimuli that ineluctably include the characteristics and the behaviour of the potential victim (Fattah, 1991).

The situational approach also pays great attention to victim-offender interactions. As Felson and Steadman(1983, pp.59-60) point out:

*Outcomes of an aggressive interaction are not determined by either the characteristics or the initial goals of the participants; rather, they are at*

*least partly a function of events that occur during the incident. In other words, violence is in part, situationally determined - the result of events and circumstances that cause a conflict to escalate.*

The situational approach posits that many crimes of personal violence, particularly spontaneous, impulsive, unplanned, and unpremeditated ones, are outcomes of long or brief interactions between two or more individuals. As such, these crimes cannot be adequately explained by static theories of criminal behaviour that focus on offender characteristics but give no consideration to the dynamic forces unique to each situation. It is these dynamic forces that determine, condition, shape or influence the offender's behaviour in that particular situation. The situational approach highlights the inherent weaknesses of dispositional theories of criminal behaviour by showing that everyone is capable of committing a crime in certain situations, when under certain pressures, in the presence of certain triggering factors.

By their very nature, dispositional theories (whether of the biological, constitutional, psychological, or sociological variety) dissociate criminal behaviour from the dynamic situational forces that trigger, provoke, determine, condition, shape that behaviour, or in other ways contribute to its occurrence. Violent behaviour, for example, could hardly be understood without a thorough analysis of the transaction that occurs between the participants prior to the perpetration of violence (Hepburn, 1973). Although this might seem axiomatic and despite the obvious dynamic and interactionist nature of violent crime, criminological research, with only a few exceptions, has focused on the perpetrator's characteristics and background, and has ignored the verbal

exchanges between the participants prior to the use of physical force.

The situational approach also pays great attention to the problems of communication in confrontational encounters, such as rape and robbery situations. It analyses the subjective definitions and interpretations of the participants and see this as a key to understanding and explaining their actions and their responses. It also examines how victims respond to face-to-face victimization and the impact of the response on the final outcome of the victimization event (Fattah, 1984; 1991). The finding of this type of research could be used to provide potential victims with some guidelines on how to behave in specific victimization situations to minimize the chances of physical injury and of the crime being completed.

#### **VII. THE ROLE VICTIMIZATION PLAYS IN OFFENDING: INTERCHANGEABLE ROLES OF VICTIM AND VICTIMIZER**

Those among you who are in daily contact with offenders have surely noticed that a large number of them feel and behave like a victim. They suffer from heightened and acute feelings of injustice. These feelings of injustice, this firm conviction that they are victims, whether the victimization is real (as it is in many cases) or perceived, there seems to be little doubt that it plays a significant role in offending.

The transformation of victims into victimizers is an intriguing, though largely ignored phenomenon. Examples of the passage from the state of victim to the state of offender abound. Among the most obvious are cases of vendetta, vengeance, reprisal, retaliation, getting even, paying back, setting of accounts, as well as cases of self-defence, vigilante action, auto-justice

or taking the law into one's own hands, to mention but a few. In all these examples, the victimization is a direct contributor to the ensuing aggression, the *sine qua non* for it. Although this phenomenon is as old as the human race itself, it is only recently that it has attracted some attention, particularly in cases of battered wives who kill their battering husbands, of abusive parents who were themselves abused as children, of rapists and other sexual predators who had been sexually molested or assaulted during their childhood. New terms such as "the cycle of violence", "intergenerational abuse" were coined to describe this curious tendency of human beings to subject others the same pain and anguish to which they had been personally subjected or to inflict upon others the same victimizations they had suffered.

The phenomenon of role reversal raises three important issues:

- (1) There is a close link between victimization and offending behaviour; they are the two sides of the same coin. Hence it is impossible to gain a true understanding of one if we ignore the other.
- (2) The victim and offender populations are not, as commonly believed, two distinct and mutually exclusive populations. They are homogeneous and overlap to a large extent. Yesterday's victims are often today's offenders, and today's offenders are frequently the victims of tomorrow.
- (3) The roles of victim and victimizer are not fixed, assigned, or static. They are dynamic, mutable, and interchangeable. The same individual can move successively,

or even simultaneously, from one role to the other.

## **VIII. VICTIMIZATION AS ANTECEDENT TO VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR**

### **A. From Victim to Offender**

The importance of victimization as a causal factor in violent offending becomes all too evident when keeping in mind the fact that retaliation is a key ingredient in violence (Felson and Steadman, 1983), that revenge is the most prevalent motive for the use of force. Gratuitous violence is the exception rather than the rule. Violence in most instances is an expression of a grievance, a response to an attack, injury, or provocation. As Black (1983) points out, violence is a mode of conflict management resembling the modes used in traditional societies which have little or no formal law.

Homicide, for example, is rarely predatory in nature. Relatively few homicides are committed for gain or sexual gratification. In the vast majority of cases the killing is a reaction (or rather an overreaction) to some form of victimization: the lover reacting to being cheated on or abandoned, the victim of adultery avenging the offended honour, the drug dealer retaliating against the police informer, the hot-blooded young male stabbing the friend who got his sister pregnant, the landowner shooting the trespasser, the double-crossed gang member applying his own brand of justice, the rape victim attempting to incapacitate the attacker, the drunk responding to an insult, threat or physical assault.

When aggression is met with aggression, when violence is countered with violence, the roles are simply reversed. The initial aggressor becomes the victim and the initial victim ends up being the victimizer. Labels are applied not on the basis of the

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original role but on the final outcome. The violent response, though defined as 'crime' by the law, is perfectly legitimate in the eyes of the perpetrator who perceives their retaliation as a justiciary act, as a rightful reprisal.

The observed link between victimization and offending is not the least surprising. The sense of being victim, whether the victimization is real or perceived, whether direct or vicarious, whether personal or collective, provides not only the motivations and justifications for offending, but also the necessary rationalizations and neutralization that make it possible for the potential delinquent to overcome whatever formal and informal controls may stand in the way of the offending behaviour, including the delinquent's moral inhibitions, religious convictions, the threat of punishment and so forth. These motivations and justifications are capable of transforming the victim into a ruthless victimizer. Cases of store or house owners who, once victimized, sit waiting with a firearm in hand for the next robber, burglar, or thief, in order to welcome the victimizer with a hail of bullets, have occurred with increasing frequency in the past few years. But these are just the extreme examples of this transformation. In schools, it is a common experience to find children whose books, articles, or supplies have been stolen by other children taking revenge by stealing the same or similar things from their school mates. Some youthful and adult car owners who have had some piece or part, such as a hubcap or mirror, stolen, do not report their victimization to the police, but instead, "help themselves" to the same part from a similar car. In doing so they feel they are only righting the wrong done to them.

Debuyst and Joos (1971) relate the story of a seventeen-year-old boy, Raoul, who had

a collection of firearms, one of which was stolen from him. Sometime later, he broke into a firearms shop and stole some firearms. His mother, breaking down in tears over her son's conduct, could not understand how such an honest boy, who was from a well-to-do family, working, and well considered by everyone, could do such a thing.

In addition to concrete feelings of victimization resulting from a specific incident or incidents in which the person was actually victimized, individuals or groups may have sentiments of injustice and a vague sense of victimization unrelated to any specific event(s). In many offenses against property, resentment over economic exploitation and social injustices serves as a means of auto-legitimation. Many thieves, professional and occasional, tend to justify their delinquent behaviour by citing social injustices and by contrasting the scandalous wealth of the upper social-classes with their own misery and poverty. White-collar tax evaders convince themselves that the tax system is unfair as it victimized and penalized the hard-working, like themselves, while allowing many others to pay less or no taxes. Cressey (1953) discovered that perceived injustice and the sense of being victimized play an important role in the cases of embezzlement, trust violations, and one may add corruption. This may take the form of feeling underpaid or overworked, or of feeling unfairly treated in some other way involving finances. Cressey points out that it is not the fact of being maltreated that is important, if such a fact can be established. Rather, it is the fact that the individual feels maltreated, while, at the same time, for some reason, feeling obligated to continue in the service of the organization.

Feelings of injustice and of victimization play a crucial role in the acts of political

terrorists and of other minority groups who have been historically the targets of violence, maltreatment, and exploitation. It is true that offending is, in many instances, a reaction to, or a consequence of, victimization, then it is easy to understand why it is that punishment quite often fails in preventing the repetition of the behaviour being punished. There can be no doubt that for those offenders who have been victimized, punishment can only be seen as an added victimization, it can only aggravate the problem that led to offending in the first place. Expressions such as "getting even", "taking it out on society" exemplify the deep resentment and frustration felt by offenders who already perceive themselves, rightly or wrongly, as victims, and who are deprived of their liberty as a means of punishment.

As mentioned earlier, offenders whose violence is a retaliation against some form of victimization view their behaviour as perfectly legitimate, and are bound therefore to perceive their punishment as unjust and unwarranted. If victimization is an important factor in offending, and I strongly believe it is, then one very effective way of preventing crime, particularly violent crime, would be to reduce the incidence of victimization, exploitation and discrimination.

### **B. From Offender to Victim**

Not only is there a strong link between victimization and offending, but there is also a close link between offending and victimization. Involvement in criminal, illegal or deviant activity greatly enhances the chance of becoming a victim. Sampson and Lauristen (1990) found a significant relationship between the risk of victimization and involvement in violence, vandalism, and theft offending. In other words, persons who engage in criminal offending sharply increase their overall

risk of victimization (p.120,126). They further found that offence activity - whether of a violent or a minor deviance, such as drinking or drug use - directly increases the risk of personal victimization.

The inter-relationship between offending and victimization was reported in many other studies. Singer (1981) found that cohort members who were shot or stabbed were involved more frequently in official and self-reported criminal activity. His findings were corroborated by Savitz, Lalli, and Rosen (1977). The same pattern was observed in England by Sparks, Genn and Dodd (1977). Gottfredson (1984) discovered that for persons with at least one self-reported violence offence, the likelihood of personal victimization was seven times the likelihood of personal victimization for persons reporting no self-reported violent offences.

Johnson et al. (1973) followed up all victims of gunshot and stab wounds admitted to the City of Austin Hospital in Texas during two years and found that 75% of the male victims had a criminal record, and 54% had a jail record. Canadian homicide statistics for 1991 (Juristat, 1992) reveal that almost half of homicide victims (45%) have a criminal record. And in an American study of gunshot victims, Paul Friday (personal communication, March 1995) found that 71% of the victims had their own criminal histories.

Of the 92 assault victims in the hospital-based sample interviewed by Cretney and Davis (1995, p32), 24 (26%) told the researchers that they themselves had a criminal record, while 16 (17%) had at least one previous conviction for assault. Other offences committed by the sample of 'victims' included: shoplifting; theft; robbery with violence; and possession and dealing in drugs.

### **IX. OFFENDERS' ATTITUDES TO THEIR VICTIMS AND HOW TO CHANGE THESE ATTITUDES**

Offenders' attitudes to their victims is an extremely important area of study in criminology, victimology and penology. This is so because such attitudes often play a crucial role in the motivational processes leading to the victimization, and a decisive role in the process of selecting the victim. For example, in the case of genocide, of terrorist activities, of acts of war, the potential targets are defined and perceived as the enemy that has to be attacked, exterminated or annihilated. Enemies evoke no sympathy, pity or compassion.

The same is equally true in conventional crimes. Rapists, for instance, have devalued images of women. They are sex objects, they are to be used for one's pleasure and then discarded or even killed. In many other offences, the victim is seen simply as a means to an end. Sutherland (1937) insists that professional thieves have no consideration whatsoever towards the victims whose wealth they are trying to steal. They think of their victims like fishermen think of a place to fish or hunters of a place to hunt.

The slang words often used by offenders to describe their victims: whore, slut, faggot, sucker, etc, betray not only their utter lack of respect, but also the contemptuous attitude they have *vis a vis* the victim. The mental process by which the victim is denied, blamed, denigrated, devalued, depersonalized may be referred to as the desensitization process.

#### **A. The Desensitization Process**

One of the most important techniques of offender rehabilitation is to counter what we call in victimology 'the desensitization process'. Criminal victimizations, whether directed at the victim's person or his/her

property, are harmful actions. They cause physical injury, material loss, psychological trauma or a combination of all three. Feelings of guilt associated with international victimizations are stronger than those evoked by negligent victimization.

Most international victimizations involve the deliberate infliction of pain and suffering upon a fellow human being. While a small minority of victimizers may fit the psychiatric label of the heartless, callous, unfeeling "psychopath", the majority are not completely insensitive, apathetic, or impassible and are not totally devoid of the human feelings of pity and empathy. Thus, unless the victimizer desensitizes himself in advance, the victimization is bound to create moral tension and to elicit feelings of guilt, shame, remorse, reproach in the perpetrator. Since the source of these negative feelings is the pain and suffering the victimization will cause to the victim, negating this pain and suffering can be an effective means of desensitization. To do so, the victimizer can use one or more of several techniques of desensitization. These include the denial, reification, depersonalization of the victim, the denial of injury, blaming the victim, devaluating or denigrating the victim, and so forth.

The desensitization process in which the victimizer engages himself prior to the commission of the act explains better than "psychopathy", "moral perversion" or "emotional indifference" why certain offenders show no sense of guilt, remorse or repentance after having committed brutal and cruel acts. It explains why certain killers, while exhibiting extreme cruelty, brutality and callousness toward their victim, show tender love and compassion for others, even for animals. In a case studied by the author (Fattah, 1971) the murderer, after savagely killing his

victim and robbing the house, took utmost care to feed the victim's dog and cat, and even left them enough food for several days, for fear that nobody would come to the scene of the crime for some time.

There are various techniques that offenders use to desensitize themselves to the harm, pain and suffering they are inflicting on their victims. One of the most common techniques of desensitization is to deny the victim, to mentally turn him/her into an object, or to try to depersonalize and dehumanize the victim.

Another technique of desensitization often used by victimizers in their attempt to shield themselves against the victim's plight, to ease their conscience, and to free themselves of any feeling of guilt, is the denial of injury. It is a common technique among rapists before and during the act. But it is also common in property victimization as well. Impersonal, non-specific and intangible victims, such as the government, large corporations, and organizations, are considered by many as appropriate targets for victimization. Victimization of them is subject to fewer (if any) moral restraints and arouses less guilt than victimization directed against a personal, identifiable victim. The impersonal and diffuse character of the victim and its intangibility evoke little moral resistance in the person contemplating the victimization. Sykes and Matza (1975) wrote:

*Insofar as the victim is physically absent, unknown, or a vague abstraction (as is often the case in delinquent acts committed against property), the awareness of the victim's existence is weakened. Internalized norms and anticipations of the reactions of others must somehow be activated, if they are to serve as guides for behaviour; and it*

*is possible that a diminished awareness of the victim plays an important part in determining whether or not this process is set in motion. (p.668)*

The idea of stealing from or cheating the government or a large organization raises fewer moral scruples than the idea of cheating a person or stealing from a family.

A third technique is 'blaming the victim'. Once victimizers are able to convince themselves that the victim has done them wrong, that he or she is guilty of some injustice, they can rid themselves entirely of any compassion for that victim and of any sense of personal culpability. By blaming the victim and transforming him or her into a person deserving to suffer, victimizers are able to go ahead with the victimization without conceiving of themselves as criminals and while shielding themselves against post-victimization dissonance. The establishment of the victim's guilt beforehand, whether the guilt is real or imagined, acts as an anaesthetic on the conscience of the potential victimizers, enabling them to destroy or injure the victim without pity or empathy.

Although blaming the victim is a common and often-used technique of autolegitimation, neutralization and desensitization, it is not a process of international distortion. In most cases, victimizers are actually convinced of their victim's guilt. Nowhere is this more evident than in crimes of passion, in political crimes, and in the crimes of paranoiacs. Crimes of passion are characterized almost invariably by a justiciary attitude on the part of the offender.

Blaming the victim is also the dominant feature of crimes motivated by revenge, the typical example of which is the vendetta.

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Here the victimization is seen as a legitimate reprisal, a rightful form of retaliation. The chain reactions resulting from the use of this type of legitimation is the development or perpetuation of a subculture of violence.

Devaluation of the victim is yet another technique of desensitization. In an attempt to desensitize themselves to the victim's plight, victimizers often attribute inferior qualities to the victim. They may devalue, denigrate and derogate the victim's worth, so that the victim appears blameworthy and deserving of the victimization because of a behaviour (he or she did something very bad) or because of their fate as a person (he or she is a bad person). This psychological process of devaluating the victim is not worked out in a logical, rational or conscious way (Ryan, 1971).

The preparation of the criminal act at the moral level is done, almost always, with reference to the attributes, personality, attitude, behaviour, and conduct of the victim. Certain attributes or qualities of the potential victim may be used to discredit and devalue him or her in an effort to present the victim as a legitimate and deserving target, and to justify the delinquent act. Attacks on homosexuals and on prostitutes are often so legitimized. Redl and Wineman (1951) found that for certain adolescents, stealing from homosexuals is a perfectly justifiable and legitimate act. Property crimes committed against prostitutes are rationalized in a similar manner. Furthermore, the forcible rape of a prostitute is also conceived of as a legitimate and guiltless act. Their style of life is interpreted as denying the right to dispose of their own body as s/he pleases; as if, because s/he sells their body to whomever pays the price, s/he no longer has the right to protest when someone tries to possess them by force. In such cases, the attitude toward the potential victim

and the possibility of justifying the act are undoubtedly important factors in the choice of the victim.

In cases of property crime, the dishonesty of the victim seems to be seen in the same way as the lifestyle of the prostitute. The businessman is defined as a "monopolistic miser," or as a "dishonest merchant" who cheats customers and therefore deserves to be victimized, and the illegal act is defined as an act of normal indignation (Schwendinger and Schwendinger, 1967). The repugnance toward the victim overcomes any thought of the victim's right.

#### **X. VICTIMOLOGICAL EXPLANATION OF REOFFENDING**

Victimological explanations of recidivism and reoffending are quite simple and more common-sense than science. If environmental conditions, if situational, triggering and actualizing factors play an important role in offending (and there is overwhelming empirical evidence showing that they do), then a released offender, returned to these same conditions and situations that led to the first offending, will have a very high chance of relapsing and of committing new offences. The best treatment and rehabilitation programs in custody cannot be successful unless the environmental conditions to which the offender is released have been changed, and unless the situational, triggering and actualizing factors have been dealt with. Changing the conditions, controlling the factors, is generally a much easier and more effective task than the difficult and elusive task of changing the offender's personality, attitudes or behaviour. After all, no one, not even the most violent of offenders, is dangerous all the time and towards everyone.

In the vast majority of cases, dangerousness is episodic and specific. To

effectively control it, one only needs to know the conditions and situations in which the person becomes dangerous, and the person or persons against whom the violence or aggression will be directed. As explained earlier, many crimes are context specific, target/victim specific. Because of this, the violence is usually strictly confined. For example, in most cases of family violence, the violence is strictly confined to the wife (or the children). In the case of incest, the father or grandfather's sexual predations are strictly confined to their offspring. If the causes of the behaviour are endogenic (that is located in the individual himself), why is it that they manifest themselves or produce the violent or sexual behaviours only in these specific contexts, against these specific victims?

victimization plays in offending, the phenomenon of role reversal, the interchangeable roles of victim and victimizer, is bound to change the views and stereotypes of offenders, help understand the motives for their behaviour, assist in establishing a rapport with them, and thus the possibility of influencing their attitudes and behaviour.

If the cause of criminal behaviour, as many criminologists claim, is lack of or weakened self-control, then how is it that the person is perfectly able to control their behaviour outside of these contexts and these targets. Good-sounding programs, such as 'anger management', simply ignore the fact that the individual has no problem controlling their anger outside of the home environment to which the violence is confined.

## **XI. CONCLUSION**

Hopefully, this brief and hasty synopsis of victimology has given you an idea of how valuable victimological knowledge could be for those who are involved in corrections generally, or offender rehabilitation in particular. Victimological knowledge is not only essential for understanding the offender and the offence, for positively and successfully influencing the offender's, attitude and behaviour, but also because it has direct implications and applications for the task of rehabilitation and resocialization. Understanding the role