

In general, these questions transcend the basics about "who, how, where, and when," and tackle the questions of "why?" and "what can be done?"—Victimologists explore not only the interactions between victims and offenders, but also victims and the criminal justice system as well as victims and the larger society.

A selection of some intriguing and imaginative studies that illustrate the kinds of issues concerning offender-victim relationships addressed by researchers over the decades appears in Box 1.4.

Victimologists, like all researchers, must adopt a critical spirit and a skeptical stance to see where the trail of evidence leads. In the search for truth, myths must be exposed, unfounded charges dismissed, and commonsense notions put to the test. The following guidelines outline the step-by-step reasoning process that can be followed when carrying out research (see Parsonage, 1979; Birkbeck, 1983; and Burt, 1983).

Step 1: Identify, Define, and Describe the Problem

The most basic task for victimologists is to determine all the different ways that a violation of the law can inflict immediate and long-term harm: the extent of any physical injuries, emotional damage, and economic costs, plus any social consequences (such as loss of status). For example, as they grow up, severely abused children might suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, dysfunctional interpersonal relationships, personality problems, and self-destructive impulses (see Briere, 1992).

Sometimes a group is difficult to study because there isn't an adequate expression that describes its common misfortune or captures the nature of its

studying activities such as sibling abuse, incestuous sexual impositions in stepfamilies, and marital rape (see Hines and Malley-Morrison, 2005).

Victimologists analyze how the status of being a "legitimate victim" is socially defined. They explore why only some people who suffer physical, emotional, or economic harm are designated and treated as full-fledged, bona fide, and officially recognized victims and as such, are eligible for aid and encouraged to exercise rights within the criminal justice process. But why are other injured parties left to fend for themselves? One key question is, "Is the social standing of each of the two parties taken into account when government officials and members of the general public evaluate whether one person should get into legal trouble for what happened and the other should be granted assistance?"

Clearly, the status of being an officially recognized victim of a crime is **socially constructed**. The determination of who is included and who is excluded from this privileged category is carried out by actors within the criminal justice process (police officers and detectives, prosecutors, judges, even juries) and is heavily influenced by legislators (who formulate criminal laws) and the media that shapes public opinion about specific incidents.

Step 2: Measure the True Dimensions of the Problem

Because policy makers and the general public want to know how serious various kinds of illegal activities are, victimologists must devise ways to keep track of the frequency and consequences of prohibited acts. The accuracy of statistics kept by government bureaus and private agencies must be critically examined to ferret out any biases that might inflate or deflate these estimates to the advantage of those who, for

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wallet as evidence, plus waste precious time in court appearances. Cannons show no hatred or contempt for their marks. In general, they rationalize their crimes as impersonal acts directed at targets who can easily afford the losses or who would otherwise be fleeced by businesses or allow their money to be taken from them in other legally permissible ways (Inciardi, 1976).

Exploring the Bonds between Captives and their Captors

Hostages (of terrorists, skyjackers, kidnappers, bank robbers, rebelling prisoners, and gunmen) are used by their captors to exert leverage on a third party—perhaps a family, the police, or a government agency. These captives could react in an unanticipated way to being trapped and held against their will. Instead of showing anger and seeking revenge, these pawns in a larger drama may emerge from a siege with positive feelings for, and attachments to, their keepers. Their outrage is likely to be directed at the authorities who rescued them for acting with apparent indifference to their well-being during the protracted negotiations. This surprising emotional realignment has been termed the **Stockholm syndrome** because it was first noted after a 1973 bank holdup in Sweden. Several psychological explanations for this “pathological transference” are plausible. The hostages could be identifying with the aggressor, and they might have

ordeal, terrorized hostages need to be welcomed back and reassured that they did nothing wrong during—and right after—their captivity. People in occupations that place them at high risk of being taken prisoner—ranging from convenience store clerks and bank tellers to airline personnel and diplomats—need to be trained about how to act, what to say, and what not to do if they are held and used as a bargaining chip during a stand-off. Law enforcement agencies need to set up and train hostage negotiation units as an alternative to solely relying on heavily armed SWAT teams whose military-style assaults endanger the lives of the captives they are trying to save. Crisis negotiators no longer consider the bonding that may occur between captives and captors to be detrimental. The development of the Stockholm syndrome actually can increase the hostages’ chances of surviving the ordeal. However, it could also mean that law enforcement cannot count on the victims’ cooperation in working for their own release and for later prosecuting their violent and dangerous kidnappers in court. In terms of frequency of occurrence, it is likely that this type of coping mechanism by captives has been overemphasized and inaccurately assumed in cases that were diagnosed by commentators in the media. Identifying with the aggressor and seeing rescuers as adversaries rarely takes place, according to an analysis of the narratives contained in the FBI’s Hostage/Barricade Database System (see Ochberg, 1978; Fattah, 1979; Symonds, 1980a; Turner, 1990; Loudon, 1998; Fuselier, 1999; and De Fabrique, Romano, Vecchi, and Van Hasselt, 2007).

some self-serving reason, wish to either exaggerate or downplay the real extent of the problem.

In order to make measurements, victimologists have to **operationalize** their concepts by developing working definitions that specify essential characteristics and also mark boundaries, clarifying which cases should be included and which should be excluded. For example, when trying to determine how many students have experienced school violence, should youngsters who were threatened

with a beating be counted, even if they were not actually physically attacked?

Once victimologists measure the frequency of some unwanted event per year, they can begin to search for changes over time to see if a particular type of criminal activity is marring the lives of a greater number or fewer people as time passes. To grasp the importance of making accurate measurements, consider the problem of child abuse. Suppose that statistics gathered by child protection agencies

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Step 3: Handled

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indicate a huge increase in the number of reported instances of suspected abuse. How can this upsurge be explained? One possibility is to interpret this spike as evidence that parents are neglecting, beating, and molesting their children these days like never before. But another explanation could be that new compulsory reporting requirements recently imposed on physicians, school nurses, and teachers are bringing many more cases to the attention of the authorities. Thus, a sharp rise in reports might not reflect a genuine crime wave directed at children by their caretakers but merely a surge in official reports because of improvements in detecting and keeping records of maltreatment. Victimologists can make a real contribution toward resolving this controversy by devising ways to estimate the actual dimensions of the child abuse problem with greater precision. Other pressing questions that can be answered by careful measurements and accurate statistics include the following: Are huge numbers of children being snatched up by kidnappers demanding ransoms? Or are abductions by strangers rare? Are husbands assaulted by their wives about as often as wives are battered by their husbands? Or is female aggression of minor concern when compared to male violence? Is forced sex a common outcome at the end of an evening, or is date rape less of a danger than some people believe (see Loseke, Gelles, and Cavanaugh, 2005)?

Once injured parties have been identified, and their ranks measured, researchers can carry out a **needs assessment** through interviews or via a survey to discover what kinds of suffering they are experiencing and what sorts of assistance and support they require to resolve their problems and return to the lives they were leading before the crime occurred. Such studies might reveal their

systems that are ostensibly designed to help them. Their studies can pinpoint the sources of tension, conflict, mistreatment, and dissatisfaction that alienate victims from the agencies that are supposed to serve them. Program evaluations determine whether stated goals are being met. For instance, many victimologists have studied how well or how poorly the police, prosecutors, judges, and family therapists are responding to the plight of abused children, sexually assaulted persons, and also battered women (see Hilton, 1993; Roberts, 2002; Hines and Malley-Morrison, 2005; Roberts and Roberts, 2005; and Barnett, Miller-Perrin, and Perrin, 2005).

Step 4: Gather Evidence to Test Hypotheses

Victimologists investigate all kinds of hypotheses: suspicions, hunches, impressions, accusations, assertions, and predictions. Like all social scientists, when presented with claims about what is true and what is false, their proper response is not to accept or reject the assertion but to declare: "Prove it! Show me! Where is the evidence?"

Testing hypotheses yields interesting findings, especially discoveries that cast doubt on common-sense notions (challenging what everyone "knows" to be true) and widely held beliefs. A major goal is try to sort out myths from realities.

For example, will the "dos and don'ts" tips offered on websites for women who are being stalked by ex-lovers actually work to reduce the risks of violent outcomes?

PROFILE 1.1 Dr. Amy Bishop, 2010

Although women are far less likely than men to commit mass murder, especially in the public sector, they can be just as deadly as men. Dr. Amy Bishop, 46, wife and mother of four children, had a long history of violent outbursts, but most people did not want to be involved or were not in a position to make the connections that linked her violent behavior. Those who did know her were able to witness some of her mood swings. So often her brilliance was diluted by her sudden bouts of rage when she felt ignored or treated unfairly. When she was 21, following a dispute at her parent's home, Bishop loaded her father's shotgun and shot and killed her 18-year-old brother, Seth. She claimed it was an accident. Bishop had come downstairs with the loaded shotgun, saying that she wanted to see how it worked and was now trying to unload it. Told not to point the weapon at Seth, she did so anyway and shot him. She fled with the shotgun in hand to a car dealership, and when confronted by police refused to surrender the weapon. An officer had to disarm her. The family supported their daughter, saying that the shooting was accidental; the ensuing investigation ultimately agreed. Twenty-six years later, following her assault on university colleagues, the investigation into her brother's death was reopened, and Bishop was also charged with his murder.

Bishop had fits of rage throughout her life. In 2002, she was charged with assault after screaming at and hitting a woman in the head at a local IHOP restaurant because the woman had taken the last available booster seat and Bishop wanted to use it for one of her children. In 1994, she was questioned in a mail bomb incident directed at a doctor at Harvard University (where Bishop had earned her doctorate and worked sporadically in postdoctoral research). Eventually, the investigation closed without charges against anyone. Bishop's neighbors reported that she did not handle criticism from others well at all. Another person noted that she had embellished her resume to indicate that she had worked at Harvard two years longer than she had. Her students feared her at times, as she would move from empathy to anger in a moment. Her volatility caused several of her graduate students to leave her labs permanently. She was outraged when not placed as first author on a scientific article for publication, even though she had no right to that position. She yelled at other people's children and could be extremely unfriendly.

Bishop joined the University of Alabama as an assistant professor in the biology department. Her husband found work as a computer engineer at a start-up company. She and her husband had developed a special method of cell preservation that could change the way biomedical research is done. In 2009, she appeared on the cover of *The Huntsville R&D Report*. All seemed to be going well until Bishop was turned down for tenure due to a weak research and publication record. She appealed the decision but was encouraged by her chair and others to start looking for work elsewhere. The family was under increasing financial stress, so Amy hired an attorney. She also started practicing with a firearm. In November 2009, her appeal was denied. On February 12, 2010, Bishop attended a departmental faculty meeting. After sitting quietly for about 30 minutes, she pulled out a handgun and shot six faculty members, killing three of them.