



## **Social Ecology And Effect Of Criminal Victimization On The Individual And Society**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The essence of the criminological study is to deal with all related issues of crime and criminality in order to provide a lasting solution to an unending problem of crime in the society. For sociologists to be able to come closer to the above reality in the society, it is very pertinent for us to expose all the related matters that have to do with crime in the society, but however, the trend that has characterized the development of criminology has been nurtured on a faulty foundation; such a foundation has been characterized by a one-dimensional approach to the study of criminal phenomenon. This has manifested clearly in the development of criminological theories ranging from demonological explanation down through biopsychological to the socio-cultural forces that produce the individual offender or the situation of crime and to the radical or even the Marxist perspectives one common theme characterized them all. Whenever there is a crime problem, intellectuals and policy makers are quick to ask what can be done to the criminals or the circumstances event that precipitate such criminality. Nobody or little care to ask about the victim and his circumstances. Much of the intellectuals' energy expended in the course of development of criminology as a field of study has largely been concentrated upon issues centering on crime, criminal law and the criminal offender. However, the total neglect of the victim of crime in the dormant of crime has called for concern. The paper examined the social ecology and effects of criminal victimization on both the individual and society at large. The paper basically used secondary sources of data to examine how a socio-demographic variable exposes individuals and society to victimization as well as the effects. At the end of the study, the paper discovered that both individual victim and society are affected by socio-ecological conditions that prompt the vulnerability of crime and its effects, as such the study recommends urgent attention by the government and cooperative bodies in the areas of support programmes for the victims of crime. The criminal justice system should be restructured in such a way that the victim will be given due recognition, the government should enact laws which will give the victims of crime the right to actively participate in the criminal proceedings of their case in court. The victim should be adequately compensated based on the gravity of pain incurred in the cause of the crime committed either by the criminal or the government. Above all, the society should also be protected from becoming vulnerable to crime in the area of crime prevention through strengthening the security agencies in combating crime and criminality.

**Keywords:** social ecology, effect of crime, victimology

## INTRODUCTION

Criminology as a scientific discipline, deals with the study of crime and criminalities: such as criminal law, sociology of law, penology, administration of criminal justice, victimology and empirical research. The essence of the criminological study is to deal with all related issues of crime and criminality in order to provide a lasting solution to an unending situation of crime in the society. For sociologists to be able to come closer to the above reality in the society, it is very pertinent for us to expose all the related matters that have to do with crime in the society.

Historically, the trend that has characterized the development of criminology has been nurtured on a faulty foundation; such a foundation has been characterized by a one-dimensional approach to the study of criminal phenomenon. This has manifested clearly in the development of criminological theories (Goldstein, 1984). Starting from demonological explanation down through bio-psychological to the socio-cultural forces that produce the individual offender or the situation of crime and to the radical or even the Marxist perspectives one common theme characterized them all. These explanations concentrated on the analysis of the individual offender and the forces that motivated his/her action (Mc Donald, 1975). Whenever there is a crime problem, intellectuals and policy makers are quick to ask what can be done to the criminals and/ or the circumstances event that precipitate such criminality. Nobody or very few cares to ask about the victim and his circumstances. Much of the intellectuals' energy expended in the course of development of criminology as a field of study has largely been concentrated upon issues centering on crime, criminal law and the criminal offender. However, the total neglect of the victim of crime in the dormant of crime has called for concern. It is against this background that this paper attempted to look into the social ecology and effects of criminal victimization on both the individual and society at large. The paper basically used secondary sources of data to examine how socio-demographic variables expose individual and society to victimization as well as the effect on them.

### Conceptual Clarification

**Social Ecology:** is the study of relationships between people and their environment, often the interdependence of people, collectives and institutions. In other words, social ecology deals with a theory about the relationship between ecology and social issues. (Wikipedia 2007), to narrow this down to victimology, social ecology of victimization, criminologists refer to it as where, when and how people are victimized.

**Victimology** is the study of the victims of crime and the psychological effect of their experience. It can also mean a mental attitude with which tends to indulge perpetuate the feeling of being a victim. (Oxford).

**Crime victims:** are persons (whether individual or corporate entities who have suffered the negative impact of criminal actions of offenders either in form of incurring economic/financial losses, sustaining of psychological injuries, losing of life, incurring psychological trauma, emotional/ physical abuse etc. (Igbo p10, 2006). From an ideal point of view, a victim is viewed as any person or a category of individual when hit by crime—most readily is given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim (cf Fattah, 1986:18). The ideal victim in this context is a sort of public status of the same type and level of abstraction as that for example, of a hero or a traitor. It is difficult to count these victims just as it is difficult to heroes. But they can be exemplified.

Fattah (1986) further identified some attributes of an ideal victim by making reference to one simple example of a little old lady on her way home in the middle of the day after taking care of her sick sister. That she is hit on the head by a big man who thereafter grabs her bag and uses the money for liquor or drugs—in that case we come close to the ideal victim. According to Fattah (1986, 19), it is so by the following attributes:

- The victim is sick, old or very young person particularly well suited as an ideal victim.
- The victim was carrying out a respectable project caring for her sister.
- She was where she could not possibly be blamed for being in the street during the day time.
- The offender was big and bad

- The offender was unknown and in no personal relationship to her

It means then to say that whenever an individual or group of individual is carrying out a respectable project where the chance of being victimized is not provided, and when hit by a crime from an unrelated offender, the individual(s) become ideal victim(s). It implies that whenever one engage in an activities that exposes him to chances of victimization, he will not be regarded as an ideal victim when victimized. Most importantly, an ideal victim is said to be weak compare to the unrelated offender, as well as having put a reasonable energy into protecting himself or herself against becoming a victim. These are necessary conditions, but not always sufficient.

The New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties (NSWCCL, 2009), sees victims of crimes as citizens who have had their lives interrupted by crime. Wikipedia (2007) noted that a victim of crime is an identifiable person who has been harmed individually and directly by the perpetrators rather than merely the society as a whole. It further observed that this may however not always be the case as with victims of white collar crime who may not be clearly identifiable or directly linked to the crime. In the same vein, the UN High Commission for Human Rights (1995) has contributed to the understanding of victims of crime. It defines victims of crimes as persons who individually or collectively have suffered harm including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights through acts or omissions that are in violation of criminal law operating within a 'state' including those laws prescribing criminal abuse of power. Furthermore, it says a person may be considered a victim of crime regardless of whether the perpetrator is identified, apprehended, prosecuted or convicted and regardless of the familiar relationship between the perpetrators and the victim. In addition, it argues that the term victim of crime also includes where appropriately, the immediate family or dependents of the direct victims or persons who have suffered harm in intervening to assist victims in distress or to prevent victimization.

The United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of power defines crime victim as persons who, individually or collectively, have suffer harm, including mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights, through acts or omissions that are in violation of criminal law operatives within the member states. A crime victim is a person who suffers anything as personal injury, death or loss of or injury to personal or real property, as a result of crime.

In legal context, crime victim is defined in the following ways:

- A personal who suffered direct or threatened physical, emotional or primary harm as a result of commission of crime.
- An institution or entity that had suffered any of the same harm by an individual or authorized representative of another entity (Karmen, 1992).

Basically, crime victim can be classified into primary, secondary and tertiary crime victim. Primary crime victims constitute those who suffered the direct or threatened harm/injury first. Secondary victims are those who experienced the harm second hand, such as intimate partners or significant others of the rape victims or children of battered woman.

Tertiary crime victims experience the harm vicariously such as through media accounts or from watching television (Karmen, 1992). The implication of this classification is that at any point in time, everyone is victim of one crime or the other. Odekunle (1986; 93) asserts that the population of victims is remote and diffuse, but refers to the generality of Nigerians.

**Society:** is a group of individuals involved in persistent social interaction, or a large social group sharing the same spatial or social territory, typical to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations. (Wikipedia, 2007). Linking this to crime victim, society stand in the position of corporate entities who have suffer the negative impact of criminal action of offender in form of economic/ financial lost and damage of property by individual or a representative of the cooperate organization. In a similar vein (Karmen, 1992), sees a society as a victim of crime in which an institution or entity that had suffered any of the same harm by an individual or authorized representative of another entity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The paper reviewed and adopts the life style theory of criminal victimization to explain the issues at hand. Life style theory of victimization emphasizes the role of an individual's life style in producing criminal victimization. According to this approach one's life style of living can expose or predispose the individual or group to victimization by crime. The relationship between personal or group life styles and risks of victimization is demonstrated in many examples of personal and group living styles. Some of these are those of persons whose ways of life are oriented toward out-door night activities. For example night parties, gambling, excessive alcohol drinker, prostitution, members of student cult group, or neighborhood gangs. Etc. we do not have to look too far to see the various ways in which these different categories of people are disproportionately exposed to victimization by crime. Person who normally lead out-door night life are at high risk of being robbed of their car or money, of being murdered, and of being assaulted in beer-drinking night patties. Gamblers have high risk probability of becoming robbery victims by losing their gambling money or jewelries to casino criminals or other criminals who may trial them and dispossess them of their valuables. Also disagreements and fights over winnings could lead to criminal assaults and death. Excessive beer drinkers have high risk of assaults or death in the event of fight in the beer parlous. They could have their money stolen. Prostitutes are at high risk of being assaulted or murdered by their patrons or clients. The former often fall prey to ritual murder. Members of cult gangs are at risk of becoming murder victims in the hands of rival gangs. The risks of becoming a crime victim can thus be a function of an individuals or groups life style. It is in this same sense that most sociologists agree that urbanism i.e. the urban way of life is correlated with crime and criminal victimization when contrasted with ruralism or the rural way of lifestyle. Victimization surveys of crime victims carried out in some countries e.g the United State (U.S) have identified several socio-economic, demographic, environmental, time, and spatial factors as risk factors which increase a person's likelihood/probability of being a crime victim. Some of these factors are; being younger, unmarried, male, unemployed, going out at night, living in an urban environment, being of low socio-economic status, living in a high crime neighborhood, being a member of a social minority group e.g minority race (see Reid, 200:46-47;Siegal, 1992). It needs to be stated however that much as these aspect of social ecology impact upon victimization rate, the causal influence/relevance of each risk factor may be found to be limited to some type of crime only, rather than extending to all. That is to say, while a giving factor may increase the chances of being victimized by violent crime. Many of the factors identified as victimization risk factors are of course not directly related to people's lifestyles. That being the case such factors is not subsumable under the lifestyle approach to victimization.

### **Social Ecology of Victimization**

Criminologists refers to the ecology of victimization as to where, when, and how people are victimized. According to the National Crime Victims Survey (NCVS) violent crimes are slightly more likely to take place in an open, public area such as a street, a park, or a field, in a school building, or at a commercial establishment such as tavern, during the day time or early evening hours (Siegel, 2005:55).

Violent crimes take place most often at the night than at the day time. However, every non-violent offence or less serious forms of violence such as pick-pocketing, purse snatching and personal larcenies or theft take place often during day time. It is also argued that for serious offences or felonies, armed robbery, aggravated assault occur mostly at night but lesser serious offences such as assault and un-armed robberies occur mostly during the day (Siegel, 2005).

Most often, street crimes take place during the day. But conventional crimes most often occur at night. Crimes of rape and simple assault occur mostly in the home. It is however, argued that a significant number of rapes, robberies, and aggravated assault do occur in public places. Siegel (1992:106) has concluded that:

One's place of residence plays an important role in one's chances of victimization. Those living in central city had significantly high rates of theft and violence than suburbanites; people living in non-metropolitan, rural areas had a victimization rate almost half than of city dwellers.

When violent crimes occur some victims are injured, others are killed, some require medical attention of hospitalization, those who are injured, received bullet wounds or wound produced by certain objects. The rate of injury from violent crime is highest for males who are between the ages of 19 and 24 (Siegel, 1992:106).

Several studies have shown that gender play a significant role in victimization. It is mostly argued that men are more likely to be victims of certain kinds of crime than women. Evidently, gender affects victimization risk, except for the crime of rape and sexual assault, male are more prone to be victims of violent crimes than their female counterpart. While male are almost twice likely than women to experience robbery, women are six times likely than men to be victims of rape or sexual assault (Siegel, 2005:56). For all crimes, it is posited that male are more likely to be victimized than female.

In another related dimension, while females are said to be most often victimized by persons they know, males are more likely to be victimized by stranger. With regard to those offenders victimizing female, about two-third were described as someone they knew or was related to. In contrast, only about half of male victims were attached to a friend, relative, or acquaintance (Siegel, 2005).

Under the social ecology of victims of crime, it is also advanced that marital status influence victimization. While never married males and females are victimized more often than married people, widows and widowers have the lowest victimization risk. Siegel (2005:58) asserts that 'this relationship between marital status and victimization is probably influenced by age, gender, and life-style: many young people, who have the highest victim risk, are actually too young to have been married; young single people also go out in public more often and sometimes interact with high-risk peers, increasing their exposure to victimization and widowers and widows suffer much lower victimization rates because they are old, interact with older people, and are more likely to stay home at night and to avoid public places.

Also the 1999 U.S National Crime victim Survey, which tried to establish nexus between the socio-demographic characteristic and the rate of victimization, has stated categorically how marital status affects individual chances of victimization. It was revealed that never married, divorced, or separated were nearly four times more likely than married persons and nearly nine times more likely than widowed person to be violent crime victims. According to the data, 'the rate of never married rate of 14.4 for married persons and 6 for widowers (cf Bohn and Halley, 2002:57).

This information simply suggests that people who are unmarried never married are more vulnerable or prone to victimization than those who are married. And this reality is a function of other socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, and lifestyle of the individuals.

The question of victimization is also linked to social status and social group that individual belong in the society. The poorest are seen as the most likely victims of violent crimes. It is argued that this association occurs across all gender, and age. Although the poor are more likely to suffer violent crimes, the wealthy are more likely the targets of personal theft crimes such as pick-pocketing and purse snatching (Siegel, 2005). Perhaps the affluent, which sports expensive attire and drives better cars, attracts the attention of thieves.

According to Sagarin and McNamara (1975:73) some group of persons have higher risk rate of becoming crime victims than others because "(a) they are more likely to have what the criminal wants, or the criminal so believes; (b) they are more frequently present in high-crime areas, in situation in which plot are hatched and crime committed, or where there are temptation that lead to victimization; (c) they are defined as physically weaker than others and hence are liable to be "chosen" as easy targets by offenders; (d) they are believed to have relatively little access to law enforcement agencies; (f) they are engaged in activities that lend themselves to manipulation by predator; (g) they participate in high risk activities,

either because of personality traits or because of goals that make the risk a necessity for assurance of success; and (h) they live on the periphery of the society, and receive so little social support for their activities that the normal constraints of ordinary persons are neutralized, because the latter define the victim as “worthless”. These factors identified are technically observable in police reports regarding the crime victim relationship in recognition of where, how and when the crime was committed, and by whom. Many more reason why different group of persons are at higher risk of becoming victims of crime than others can be established through survey research conducted with criminal themselves, self-report victims, ex-criminal offenders, present and former criminal justice agents, medical examiners and others.

### **The Effects of Criminal Victimization**

The effects of criminal victimization are invariably synonymous to the impact of crime. In this regard, there are two dimensions; the impacts on the individual victims; and the impacts on the society at large. However, the chief concern of this study is on both.

Fundamentally, crime is accompanied by certain consequences that seriously affect the general conditions of the crime victims. The primary and immediate effect on the victim is infliction of injury, harm or pain. Siegel (1992:106) asserts that “when violent crime occurs, some victims are injured, some others are killed, while some require medical attention or hospitalization”. Those who are injured either receive gunshot wounds or wounds produced by certain objects. Dambazzau, (1999; 126) in his attempt to conceptualize the word “victim” also rightly stated that a victim must have suffered such things as personal injury, death, loss of or injury to personal or real property as a result of crime” this simply indicates the fact that the primary effects of crime or criminal victimization are harm and injury to the victims. This harm or injury could be on the individual victims directly or their properties. Moreover, sometimes the harm could result or lead to the death of individual victims.

Another considerable effect of victimization on the crime victims is economic loss. In the words of Siegel (2005:52) “the cost of goods taken during property crime is added to productivity loss caused by injury, pain, and emotional trauma, the cost of victimization is estimated to be in the hundreds of billions of dollars”. Most instance of criminal victimization involves financial loss or wastage either as a result of direct loss (as in stealing), cost of damage to property, or due to cost incidental to victimization such as medical treatment, litigation, etc.

The cost in monetary terms of victimization arising from property, person, and other kinds of crimes can be quite heavy and staggering. And these cost are inescapably borne by victims, except in a relatively few marginal cases when police allow reimbursement or indemnification (Igbo, 2006).

In addition, a crime victim is argued to have been abused by the system. The suffering endured by crime victims does not end when their attacker leaves the scene of the crime. They may suffer more victimization by the justice system in the hands of the police, and the courts in the process of investigation and persecution of offender (Igbo, 2006:248). They are often inconvenienced by the lack of consideration with regard to court scheduling of cases, harassed by the alleged offenders, and in some cases, threatened with further crimes.

Victims of crime also suffer stress and anxiety long after the incident is over and the justice process has been forgotten. For instance, spousal abuse victims suffer an extremely high prevalence of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (and emotional disturbance following exposure to stress outside the normal human experience), anxiety disorder, and obsessive compulsive disorder (an extreme preoccupation with certain thoughts and compulsive performance of certain behaviors) (Siegel, 2005). Some victims are found to be physically disabled as a result of serious wounds sustained during episodes of random violence including a growing number that suffer paralyzing spinal cord injuries. And if victim have no insurance, the long term effects of the crime may have devastating financial as well as emotional and physical consequences.

Another considerable effect victimization has on crime victim is fear. People who suffer criminal victimization remain fearful long after their wounds have healed. A study concerning an effort to reduce gang crime and drug dealing in some of Chicago’s troubled housing projects failed to meet its objectives

because residents feared relation from gang boys and possible loss of relationship; joining an effort to organize against crime placed them at extreme risk (Siegel, 2005:54). The fear of victimization is an affective emotional experience. It is both an expressed attitude and a psychological state provoke by an immediate sense of personal risk (Skogan, 1986). While individual holds belief about crime, they feel danger.

Another effect considered is anti-social behavior. There is growing evidence that crime victims are more likely to commit crime themselves. Being abused or neglected increase the odds of being arrested, either as a juvenile or an adult. People especially young males, who were physically or sexually abused, are much more likely to smoke, report significant amount of post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of prior victimization, which may in part explain their violent and criminal behavior.

Another effect of crime victim is that, it leads to insecurity of lives and properties. In various crime incidences, innocents' citizens are killed, thereby reducing the population of the country, this have a serious economic implication for the nation. For instance, Neubeck (1979) estimates that money and goods values at \$142 million were stolen from robbery victims in 1976. Yecho (2010:22) similarly, laments that, a successful robbery entails the direct loss of property on an individual. Such property is transferred from the rightful owner to another Person. Most violent crime also leads to the loss of productivity through the incapacity of the victims. Most of the victims of violent crimes are incapacitated, thereby denying the society of their contribution to the output of the nation.

Another effect is loss of trust/faith in society, particularly in the local community or in relation to the social group or place where the offence occurred. Though shock is typically a relative short-term effect (days or weeks), the loss of trust may persist for years. It is this effect which has led to the ad vocation of the 'listening ear' provided by local victim support volunteers;

The effects of victimisation, particularly of shops or community facilities, may also ripple out through the community (Shapland and Vagg, 1988),

### **CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION**

It is pertinent and glaring that the effect of crime has a diverse impact on both the individual and the society. The victims of crime encounter multiple problems which come both from the angle of criminal justice system and the society such as neglect in the justice processes, harassment and intimidation in the hands of the police and criminal court of justice, physical harm, economic loss psychological trauma and the rest. However because of the above fact this paper recommended that:

- There should be a support programmed for the victims of crime.
- The criminal justice system should be restructured in such a way that, the victim will be given due recognition.
- The government should enact laws which will give the victims of crime right to actively participate in the criminal proceeding of their case in court.
- The victim should be adequately compensated base on the gravity of pain incurred in the cause of the crime by the government.
- The society should also be protected from becoming vulnerable to crime in the area of crime prevention through strengthening the security agencies in combating criminal activities in the society.

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