



Research Article

VICTIMIZATION; THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS ON VICTIM- A GENERAL FORENSIC OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Victim is any human who has received any physical or psychological adverse incident. **Victimization** involves the processes and factors of turning a normal person into a victim by a series of events and addendum. It is very often observed that the clearest statements about an incident, involvement of people in the incident and other factors are most likely to be identified accurately by the victim. Therefore, victimization is not a point of concern until the victim is not secure about the events that has happened. The concern arises, when the victim is made vulnerable, by physical or psychological abuse. The effects of victimization are more dangerous when they are psychological, as they not only affect the case but may also affect the victim to the point where he/she might tend towards the criminal tendencies. Thus, it illustrates that victimization and its effects be studied more diligently to avoid unfortunate deviance in a case. For amelioration and results in criminal proceedings, it is most importantly to retain and ensure the safety and security of the for serve justice. This theoretical research has helped, to study and analyze the factors leading to victimization and the psychological impact of victimization on the victim and the case of concern.

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INTRODUCTION

The functioning of the human brain is tremendous which are the behavioral attributes of a working brain. Each individual reacts differently for different scenarios or aspects. These behavioral changes are easily observed by a psychologist¹. When a crime occurs, the main constituents of the incident are the victim and the accused. The accused usually behaves in a manner so that he/she wouldn't be caught under any circumstances^{2,3}. At the same time, a victim is the one who takes the brunt and ultimately ends up having physical or psychological injuries. It must be taken into consideration that if the victim's mental stability is questionable, then the incidents and accounts stated by the individual could also be questioned. Therefore, it is most important to understand the victim's state of mind and treat any unusual behavior before the criminal proceedings in order to obtain true facts and testimonies⁴.

The effects of victimization are more prone and better understood by a forensic psychologist, in terms of both, human behavior and legal aspects.

For the same perspective, the information procured would be more reliable, only then, this will also aid in having efficient judicial proceedings. From the late 1980's and early 1990's, many investigators in the U.S. had involved forensic psychologists in their investigations for better victim treatment and attaining useful confessions and cues for their investigations and more evidence retrieval⁵. This had helped in better crime solving with accurate reconstruction of crime scene, culprit identification and better court verdicts to serve justice to the victim.

Victimization

Although, victimization has no peculiar definition, still, it is the process of turning a normal person into a victim is called victimization. Victimization can be called as a natural phenomenon or in the occurrence of a crime, it is obvious that there would be the formation of a victim. A victim is structured due to the ill-effects of the criminal incident that has occurred⁶. Therefore, it is a matter of fact that the individual would show signs of being affected and develop certain unusual or unnatural behaviors. So, it is important to understand that victimization is not a matter of concern in itself and is completely natural till the victim is secure about the incidents which occurred⁷.

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The concern of victimization arises when the incident, people involved in the incident (culprit, accused or any other related person) or any factor leads the victim to a state of trauma or instability, by physical or psychological abuse. In cases, where witnesses are threatened to the point where they fear the case proceedings or other related incidents, it can also be called victimization. Victimization is an event which can be triggered when someone frequently questions the victim about the incident or tries to recreate the trauma or creates another powerful trauma/shock⁸. People around the victim, including the relatives of the victim, peer group, health professionals, investigators involved or even the court, can aid the process of negative victimization.

Psychological Victimization

When a crime is committed, the victim's (injured/ witness) mental health is the most affected and becomes the primary concern during the investigations. The trauma caused due to an unexpected disastrous incident is enough to disturb a normal person's state of mind. When this trauma is further aided by physical abuse like manhandling, use of weapons, threatening, etc. or psychological abuse i.e. use of drugs, mental torturing, creating traumatic triggering situations, etc., the victim tends to lose his/her normal senses and feels vulnerable⁹. This vulnerability may be further instigated during the criminal proceedings or other after-events, which leads to deprivation of victim health and also deviation in case proceedings.

The vulnerability caused due to psychological triggers is much difficult to handle as they are intended to affect the individual brain functions and behaviors; or it can be stated that the traumatic stress caused by an incident which affects the person's mental health, ultimately, alters the individual behavior and habits. And so, victimization takes a negative aspect and deprives the victim as a person, eventually (mostly) leading to development of psychological disorders or criminal tendencies¹⁰. This is seen mostly in rape cases, murder witnessing and juvenile crimes.

Psychological Effects of Victimization

At the time of human brain development, the areas of the human brain develop gradually and show changes, which aid the normal functioning of the brain and help to manage stressful conditions appropriately. When an unnatural or unexpected harmful event or a psychic trauma occurs, the brain responds and functions immediately in order to reduce the stress created suddenly. The functions of the prefrontal cortex and hippocampus are, thus, initiated in response to the stress. In response to this, anti-depressing reactions, i.e., release of norepinephrine and cortisol are released. But, in conditions where the brain is instigated and triggered multiple times or intensely a single time, the response becomes intense and disturbed, thus, disturbing the individual brain normality, hormonal functions, mental health and emotional stability¹¹.

The disturbed working of the brain leads to conditions of developing psychological disorders. The effect of the disorder may be short-term (limiting to duration of days to a few months) or long-term (extending from years to a lifetime). The psychological disorders may include personality disorders, substance abuse, depression, split personality, impairment of senses (temporary or permanent) or development of disorders like PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), Acute Stress disorder (ASD), disinhibited social engagement disorder

(DSED), etc¹². This type of behavioral changes or symptoms can be acute, chronic or complex. In case of acute and rarely chronic conditions, these can be treated in order to help the victim lead a normal life eventually.

Some of the major psychological effects of victimization that are widely studied and most observed in a victimized individual are depression, aggression, anxiety disorders and PTSD (of whose symptoms include depression, anxiety disorders).

Post- traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is one the most common disorders which develop after the traumatic incident. It is one of the most researched areas in psychology and forensic psychology, especially for after- crime studies. The effect of depressing incidents and generation of anti-depressants simultaneously by the brain affects its normal functioning. This may produce long-term adverse effects too. The studies on PTSD in the past years has shown that individuals developing/ having this disorder show symptoms of hallucinations, excessive fear, verbal disabilities, uncontrolled anger and unnatural mood swings. The existence of such conditions affects the question of credibility of the victim's statements¹³. The victim might not respond appropriately in order to avoid questions or conditions which trigger their well- being. Or the questioning during the criminal case proceedings might instigate them to turn harmful to themselves or people around them. They might not, at times, remember the incidents clearly or may make up things which might have not actually occurred. The fear of reconstruction of the incident can also affect their testimonies.

According to existing scholarly studies, it has been observed that more than 8% of the population of the U.S. develops a condition of PTSD in some or the other point of their lives due to the occurrence of some traumatic event (the frequency is more in people who have witnessed or have been victimized during childhood & teenage). This has led to cases where the perpetrator was wrongly identified, and actual culprit was set free. The Innocence Project of 1992 has proven that in many of the cases the accused was later proved to be innocent¹⁴. The wrongful testimonies given by victims or witnesses, who had developed disorders due to victimization during the criminal proceedings, led to wrong verdicts. The cases, where the police followed wrong questioning patterns which affected the victimized person and the ultimately misled the case, are also mentioned in the project. Therefore, it is important to understand the necessity of studying and analyzing the victim before such proceedings in order to attain authentic and reliable information relating to the incident¹⁵. The safety and security of the victim should be ensured in order to make them ease for the reliable testimonies.

Depression and aggression caused by the sudden loss/ harm or repeated stimulated brain functions affects the track of memory and alters the emotional stability. The condition is accompanied with the feeling of anxiety, insecurity and distress, which aid to further emotional instabilities. In the historical background, there have been cases where the improper questioning pattern of investigators has led to deterioration of memory of victim or witness and thus, leading to attainment of wrong or incomplete testimonies¹⁶. In such cases, it becomes difficult to get the right information even after the victim has recovered.

Personality disorders are initiated by the sudden trauma that influences the person to behave differently in different conditions or differently under similar conditions unintentionally due to shock caused. In few cases where juveniles are involved, such disorder are frequently observed. Sexual assault case victims also tend to have such conditions, wherein at time, they become vulnerable when they remember the incident and at times, under similar conditions, show hostile behavior. In the past, the repetitive questioning or frequent court trials, hospital visits and media attention, parent or relative agony, teasing from peers and fear of recurrence of the incident have contributed to development of indecent or inappropriate behavior in rape victims¹⁷.

Other than the above discussion, the victim may also develop conditions like loss of memory or loss of speech. Moreover, the psychological effects may extend to various other disorders and instabilities which are not discussed above, or which have not been studied in the past. Moreover, the ultimate fact that the existence of a traumatic incident and the stimulation of brain functions affect the victim memory, emotional stability and survival of the victim makes the psychological study on victimization necessary. Another responsible fact is that, the development of psychological disorders may not be necessarily caused by the incident or accused, but may be triggered the after- event environment of the victim, which includes response from parents, siblings, peer group, relatives or neighbors¹⁸. The age and gender of the individual may also affect the intensity of the effect of the incident.

The after-effects of victimization are more prolonged in case of juveniles and teenagers. They tend to develop criminal tendencies in the near or far future. The feeling of loneliness, lack of attention or unnecessary attention, peer group response and response of the immediate society around them are factors which affect their behaviors after being involved in a criminal case (even though as a victim). These eventually lead to lack of interest in studies, distancing from families, peer group changes, substance abuse, personality disorders, psychotism and the list could continue onto many more worse changes, which could eventually give the society a victimized criminal in future.

Role of Forensic Psychologists in Victimisation

Forensic psychology is an emerging area in the field of forensic field. Due to the existing professions of psychologists and psychotherapists, the importance of forensic psychologists is often neglected. But this negligence often results in wrongful judgments in many criminal offences. In so many cases, wherein the lawyer cannot explain the mental health or psychological behavior of the person is in question? the court may fail to understand the real scenarios and, may relay on the overview of the potential evidences. The role of forensic psychology and psychologists starts from here, where they can give their testimonies in accordance to the legal aspects and also help to deal with the behavior of people involved in the crime. This would be more credible in the court of law and thus serve justice to the real victim¹⁹. Forensic psychologist, being one to have expertise in law and psychology can play a crucial aspect in dealing with criminal cases involving psychological trauma²⁰.

In the antiquity, forensic psychologists have helped in cases which were on the verge of abandoning. Their findings have helped to catch the culprit in cases where there was no hope.

Since the early 1990's, the involvement of forensic psychologists has slowly increased in criminal cases, especially in western countries²¹. The case histories where the culprit was mentally unstable and could not be captured, forensic psychologists have helped to identify them by dealing with the victims psychologically in order to identify the culprits. Similarly, there are cases where psychologists have helped victims to regain their conscious and senses and have helped the court of law with better and authentic testimonies²².

CONCLUSION

By the existing scholarly work and case reviews, it has been observed that the importance of forensic psychologists is still not properly understood in many case scenarios. Though the credibility of forensic psychologists may be questioned at times, the fact that they have been proved useful in cases where none other than evidences could be found is also important. When forensic psychologists would be involved in criminal proceedings, the behavioral aspects of the victim or any other person involved in the crime could be studied. Since the person victimized is the one who usually faces a lot of psychological challenges, understanding their conditions and helping them out of the trauma would help in better memory retrieval and lesser false testimonies. The lessening of the psychological barriers raised by victimization would ultimately mean appropriate and just court verdicts. This would also decrease the structuring of victimized criminals in the society and decreased fear of victimization among individuals even during adverse conditions. The crime rate would be affected gradually and would also form better society and judicial system. Thus, it can be concluded that the understanding of psychological aspects in a crime could lead to better criminal justice system.

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