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THE VICTIM–OFFENDER OVERLAP

One facet about victimization that cannot be ignored is the link that exists between offending and victimization and between offenders and victims. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the first forays into the study of victims included a close look at how victims contribute to their own victimization. In this way, victims were not always assumed to be innocents; rather, some victims were seen as being at least partly responsible for bringing on their victimization—for instance, by being an offender who is victimized when the victim fights back. Although the field of victimology has moved away from placing blame on victims, the recognition that offenders and victims are often linked—and often the same person—has aided in the understanding of why people are victimized.

Take, for instance, the case of Terrance Williams. In the early 1980s while just 18 years of age, Williams murdered two men. He was later tried and convicted for those crimes, receiving a sentence of death for one of the murders in which the district attorney claimed Williams robbed and then brutally killed his victim. Nearly three decades later, new evidence pertaining to the case and, more specifically, Williams’s childhood and alleged relationship with his victim, was heard in court as the defense petitioned for a stay of execution. Read the news story to find out more about the possible link between victimization and offending in the Williams case.

CASE STUDY

WILL PENNSYLVANIA EXECUTE A MAN WHO KILLED HIS ABUSERS?

Terrance Williams was 18 years old when police arrested him for the murders of Herbert Hamilton and Amos Norwood. The arrest shocked the local community, who had come to know Williams as the talented quarterback of the high school football team with a promising future ahead of him. At the time of his arrest, Williams had graduated from high school and begun college at a state school in Philadelphia. Those who knew Williams described

him as an all-American boy, but this image contrasted sharply with the details of the crimes.

At the age of 17, Williams was having sex with Herbert Hamilton, age 51, in return for money. Williams murdered Hamilton in 1984 after the latter threatened to reveal their relationship to others. On the date in question, Williams met Hamilton at his home for sex. After Hamilton undressed, Williams brandished a 10-inch butcher knife that Hamilton knocked away. Hamilton

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rushed to the kitchen to call 911, but Williams repeatedly assaulted Hamilton with a baseball bat. Following this, Williams fatally stabbed Hamilton numerous times all over his body. Williams left the knife sticking out of Hamilton's body and poured kerosene on him, hoping to destroy the evidence, but ultimately failed to set the kerosene on fire. The police did not suspect Williams of committing the crime at this time.

Less than five months later, Williams, now 18, duped Amos Norwood, age 56, into giving him a ride to a remote location. Once there, Williams and an accomplice stripped Norwood, restrained him, and gagged him with his own socks. Williams then retrieved a tire iron and a heavy wrench from the car. Williams and his accomplice used the tools to beat Norwood to death. Later that evening, Williams returned to burn the body with the help of gasoline.

At the trial, Williams's mother testified that his stepfather routinely abused alcohol and verbally and physically lashed out at Williams. During one episode, Williams's stepfather shoved him down an entire flight of steps. The trial concluded with the jury convicting and sentencing Williams to death.

Twelve years later, during a hearing guaranteed by the Pennsylvania Post Conviction Relief Act (PCRA), new details were uncovered. At that time, Williams's mother admitted to hitting him "like Muhammad Ali" when she would pick him up from school. This account was confirmed by Williams's teacher. Williams's older brother also admitted to beating Williams, throwing him down a staircase, and trying to shoot him with a gun. Williams also endured several extended episodes of sexual abuse that started at age 6. At that time, a neighborhood boy sexually abused him. As a young teenager, Williams endured routine sexual abuse from a school teacher. Amos Norwood, Williams's second murder victim, also physically and sexually abused Williams when he was 13. This abuse continued for many years. Court documents alleged that Norwood had sexually assaulted Williams as recently as the night before Williams killed Norwood. At age 15, Williams was sexually assaulted by another man. Herbert Hamilton, Williams's first victim, had also sexually assaulted him at one point. In total, eight witnesses testified that Williams had suffered "a childhood plagued by frequent physical and sexual abuse."

In an appeal to the Third Circuit of the United States Court of Appeals, Williams argued that his lawyer failed

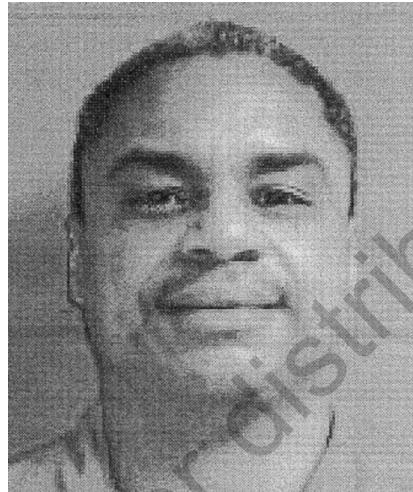


PHOTO 3.1

Did Terrance Williams's experiences as a victim while a child lead to his violent behavior as an emerging adult? Does his history of victimization mitigate the seriousness of the crimes he committed? Should Williams be considered a victim or a criminal? These questions are central to the victim-offender overlap. In this chapter, we discuss the connection between victimization and offending.

to thoroughly investigate the case. Specifically, Williams alleged that his lawyer was unable to present an account of the repeated physical and sexual abuse that he endured as an adolescent because the lawyer failed to investigate it as a possibility. Williams contended that this evidence could have served as a mitigating factor to persuade the jury to issue a life sentence without the possibility of parole rather than a death sentence.

As Williams's execution date approached, approximately 150 child psychologists, judges, jurors from the original trial, and prosecutors urged the Pennsylvania governor to stay the execution. This support was mobilized in part due to the recognition of the extreme victimization Williams had endured for more than a decade and the fact that both of Williams's victims had previously sexually abused him. In 2012, a judge issued Williams a stay of execution. This stay was upheld by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. The current Pennsylvania governor, Tom Wolf, declared a moratorium on all executions in the state on February 13, 2015, that is still in effect.

Sources: Segura, L. (2012, September 12). Will Pennsylvania execute a man who killed his abusers? *The Nation*. <http://www.thenation.com/blog/169881/will-pennsylvania-execute-man-who-killed-his-abusers>; *Williams v. Beard*, 637 F.3d 195 (2011).

THE LINK BETWEEN VICTIMIZATION AND OFFENDING

Ask any social scientist what the major causes of crime and victimization are, and you are bound to get a variety of responses. Often cited are age, sex, low self-control, urbanization, and poverty. While we might not all agree as to what the “facts” are, there are several correlates that have generated a consensus in the field as being top predictors of crime and victimization, and the **victim–offender overlap** is definitely on that list (M. Berg, 2012). Case in point, a review of the literature found 37 empirical studies spanning five decades dedicated to the study of the victim–offender overlap, of which the vast majority (84%) found considerable support for the presence of the overlap within a diversity of samples (see the Focus on International Issues box for a discussion of cross-cultural research on the victim–offender overlap) and across a wide range of criminal behaviors (Jennings, Piquero, & Reingle, 2012). In this chapter, we discuss a few of these including homicide and intimate partner violence.

Victim and Offender Characteristics

The typical victim and the typical offender have many commonalities. As mentioned before in our discussion of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) in Chapter 2, the groups with the highest rates of violent victimization are young black males. The Uniform Crime Report (UCR) also provides information on offenders. The groups with the highest rates of violent offending are also young black males. The typical victim and the typical offender, then, share common demographics. In addition, both victims and offenders are likely to live in urban areas. Thus, individuals who spend time with people who have the characteristics of offenders are more likely to be victimized than others.

Sampson and Lauritsen (1990) have advanced the principle of homogamy to better explain demographic similarities between offenders and victims. The premise of this idea is that associating with criminals increases a person’s risk of victimization. The connection between victims and offenders makes sense, as offenders are more likely to associate with others who are in close proximity to them—people they live, work, go to school, or spend time with. Therefore, the victims of their crimes will be people who are similar to them (the offenders) on such characteristics as race, socioeconomic status, and neighborhood.

Whereas research has found similarities between offenders and victims (i.e., victim–offender overlap), other research has noted the existence of role differentiation between the two. This has led some researchers to contend that there are actually three distinct types of individuals involved in crime (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2000). There are **victims** (sometimes referred to as “pure” or “exclusive” victims). These are individuals who have been victimized, but do not engage in crime. There are **offenders** (sometimes referred to as “pure” or “exclusive” offenders). These are individuals who engage in crime but have no victimization history. Last, there are victims who are also offenders (aka **victim–offenders**). Victim–offenders are individuals who have histories of both victimization and offending. Research that has examined the possibility of three groupings finds support for Mustaine and Tewksbury’s (2000) assertion that while an overlap exists for a majority of victims and offenders, the overlap is not present for all victims or offenders (Muftić & Hunt, 2013). For

example, Craig et al. (2009) utilized data on 200,000 children from 40 different countries who participated in the Health Behavior in School-Aged Children survey to assess the victim–offender overlap within bullying. They found that almost 13% of children had been bullied (but had not bullied others), about 11% had bullied others (but had not been bullied themselves), and roughly 4% had bullied others and had been bullied themselves.

FOCUS ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

The vast majority of research examining the overlap between victimization and offending has been conducted with samples from North America and Western Europe. Less is known about the victim–offender overlap from a non-Western perspective. Research that has investigated the victim–offender overlap with more diverse samples from Bosnia and Herzegovina (Muftić & Deljković, 2012), Colombia (Klevens, Duque, & Ramírez, 2002), Puerto Rico (Maldonado-Molina, Piquero, Jennings, Bird, & Canino, 2009), and South

Korea (Jennings, Park, Tomscih, Gover, & Akers, 2011), and samples of Puerto Ricans residing in the United States (Maldonado-Molina, Jennings, Tobler, Piquero, & Canino, 2010) largely confirms what we know from the aforementioned Western-focused research. That is, that there exists a considerable amount of overlap between victimization and offending in a variety of crime types including juvenile delinquency, property crime, interpersonal violence, and sexual assault.

Source: Reprinted from Muftić, L. R., & Deljković, I. (2012). Exploring the overlap between offending and victimization within intimate partner violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *International Criminal Justice Review*, 22(2), 192–211.

EXPLAINING THE LINK BETWEEN VICTIMIZATION AND OFFENDING

As you can see, the victim–offender overlap centers around the acknowledgment that victims and offenders share a multitude of characteristics. This is compounded by the fact that involvement in a criminal event, whether as a victim or as an offender, increases *both your offending and victimization risk*. In other words, if you've experienced one type of criminal event (e.g., offending), you're likely to experience the other (e.g., victimization). There are several reasons why this might be. We discuss a number of them in this section.

Dynamic Causal Perspective

In general, there are two types of theoretical arguments when it comes to explaining the relationship between victimization and offending: the dynamic causal perspective and the population heterogeneity argument (Ousey, Wilcox, & Fisher, 2011). The **dynamic causal perspective** suggests that the linkage between victimization and offending occurs due to the influence and impact of these experiences directly on one another. Essentially, this argument is based on the claim that specific negative incidents (e.g., victimization) modify attitudinal and behavioral patterns, in turn shifting the likelihood for engaging in the other (e.g., offending; Ousey et al., 2011). There are several theories that fall under the dynamic

causal perspective: general strain theory, routine activities and lifestyle theory, subcultural theories, and the victim-rationality perspective. These theories have differing ideas about the temporal ordering of the victim–offender overlap (victimization leads to offending vs. offending leads to victimization).

General Strain Theory

Robert Agnew's general strain theory falls within the dynamic causal perspective because it asserts that victimization can lead to subsequent offending. Simply put, general strain theory proposes that individuals who experience negative emotion, such as stress, strain, frustration, depression, or anger, are likely to commit crime (Agnew, 2006). While negative emotive states can be caused by the failure to achieve a positively valued goal (like failing an exam) or the loss of a positively valued goal (e.g., losing your job), stress and strain can also come about from the presentation of negative stimuli, such as having been the victim of a crime.

Agnew's theory is one of only a few that identifies victimization as a risk factor for offending. Accordingly, Agnew contends that being victimized is a highly stressful experience and can cause negative emotion. In order to cope with the feelings that come from being victimized (e.g., anger, fear, anxiety), victims will rely on coping mechanisms to alleviate the distress they are experiencing. These coping mechanisms may be noncriminal. For instance, victims often find that talking with a trained professional helps them deal with the victimization process. Other victims, however, may find themselves driven to criminal coping behaviors. Retaliatory behavior, brought on by the desire to exact revenge, is a prime example. As we explore other dynamic causal explanations for the victim–offender overlap, you will notice that retaliation is a common thread linking victimization and offending.

Routine Activities and Lifestyles Theory

Probably the most often cited theoretical explanation given for the relationship between victimization and offending is the routine activities and lifestyles perspectives (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Hindelang, Gottfredson, & Garofalo, 1978). It is not hard to understand why this may be the case. Offending can be viewed as part of a risky lifestyle. Individuals who engage in offending are exposed more frequently to people and contexts in which victimization is likely to occur (Lauritsen, Laub, & Sampson, 1992). Hence, a routine activities/lifestyles perspective predicts that offending increases risk for subsequent victimization. Additionally, their status as an offender makes them “legally vulnerable” and hence an attractive target for would-be predators. Take for instance drug dealers. Drug dealers often find themselves the victims of robbery, but due to the illicit nature of their work, they can't call the police for fear of incriminating themselves. Read what happens to a couple of drug dealers who call the police after being robbed. Do you think they should have been arrested? Are they victims or offenders? Can they be both?

Subcultural Theories

There also may be a link between victimization and offending that is part of a broader cultural belief in the acceptability and sometimes necessity of violence, known as the subculture of violence theory. This theory proposes that for certain subgroups of the population

and in certain areas, violence is part of a value system that supports the use of violence, in response to disrespect in particular (Wolfgang & Ferracuti, 1967). In this way, when a subculture that supports violence exists, victims will be likely to respond by retaliating. Let's revisit the example of the two drug dealers who called the police to report being robbed. Urban drug dealers are often part of a subculture with values and norms that promote violence as an appropriate response to victimization. Thus, in order to protect their turf and save face, drug dealers are likely to retaliate against the person who robbed them. Thus, similar to routine activities theories, subcultural theories predict that victimization may lead to subsequent offending. Recent research shows that the victim-offender overlap does indeed vary across neighborhoods and that this variation is related to the neighborhood's strength of attachment to the "code of the streets" and degree of structural deprivation (Berg & Loeber, 2011; Berg, Stewart, Schreck, & Simons, 2012).

An alternate, albeit plausible argument is that within street subcultures, a perilous lifestyle acts as a deterrent against victimization. As word spreads that an individual is willing to "fight back" or "seek revenge" following an attack, the less attractive the person becomes as a target (Berg & Loeber, 2011). Research that has utilized longitudinal data to examine the link between offending and victimization has found support for this contention. Specifically, Xiaojin Chen (2009) found that the more enmeshed an individual was in a deviant lifestyle in early adolescence, the greater the decline in victimization over time (X. Chen, 2009).

VICTIMOLOGY IN THE NEWS

DRUG DEALERS REPORT BEING VICTIMS OF ARMED ROBBERY

In February 2012, two teenage boys, Kyle Hodges and Calvin Williams, called police to report being victims of an armed robbery. Savannah-Chatham (Georgia) Metro Police responded at approximately 11 p.m.

Upon arrival, the officers found a "large amount of marijuana" (Sanders, 2012) inside Williams's vehicle. The street value was estimated at approximately \$10,000. The two individuals, who initially called to report being robbed at gunpoint, were promptly arrested and charged with Possession of Marijuana with Intent to Distribute and Criminal Attempt to Sell a Controlled Substance, among others.

With the assistance of the Savannah State University Police, authorities located Darius Harper, age 20, as their prime suspect for the armed robbery. Prior to apprehension and arrest, Harper ran from police. Even though Harper could not be clearly linked to the armed robbery, upon arrest he was charged with Loitering, Prowling, and Obstruction by Fleeing. Officers searched the area where Harper was originally located and "found clothing matching the description of the armed robber, along with a pistol and marijuana" (Sanders, 2012).

Source: Adapted from A. Sanders. [2012]. Two accused drug dealers call police to report armed robbery. <http://www.wsav.com/story/21211356/two-accused-drug-dealers-call-police-to-report-armed-robbery>.

Victim-Rationality Perspective

While subcultural theories propose that victimization likely leads to offending, an alternate perspective is that victimization can decrease subsequent offending. This perspective is

known as the victim-rationality perspective and rests on the assertion that not all victimizations lead to retaliatory behavior. Essentially, the victim-rationality perspective is premised on the hypothesis that the victimization experience can serve as a turning point for some offenders (Jacques & Wright, 2008). This turning point comes about when an offender recognizes that the victimization he or she has experienced is the result of his or her offending and that if he or she stops, or at least drastically reduces, offending, he or she will also reduce the risk of being victimized in the future.

Interviews conducted with drug-involved offenders revealed that victimization is a highly common experience, with 9 out of 10 men having experienced at least one victimization (Vecchio, 2013). Of the men who had been victimized, two out of three said that after they had been victimized they modified their offending behavior in an effort to avoid subsequent victimization (Vecchio, 2013). In addition, research indicates that some victims make changes to their lifestyle following a victimization experience. These alterations are generally for the better, with these individuals discontinuing their involvement in violent crimes, drug dealing, and different forms of trafficking (Pyrooz, Moule, & Decker, 2014).

Population Heterogeneity Perspective

We have just discussed the dynamic causal perspective used to explain the link between victimization and offending. The second theoretical viewpoint on the victim–offender overlap is referred to as the population heterogeneity perspective. The **population heterogeneity perspective**, or the “noncausal” argument, essentially states that victimization does not cause offending or vice versa but rather that they are both related to a personality characteristic or environment that does not change over time. Consequently, an individual’s offending and victimization may be related to having low self-control or living in an environment with a high crime rate. Since offending and victimization are essentially a result of one of these characteristics and/or environments, they do not directly affect each other. In other words, if this perspective is accurate, then personality and environmental factors that do not significantly change over time should completely reduce the relationship between offending and victimization.

General Theory of Crime

Simply put, the general theory of crime states that crime (defined as “an act of force or fraud done in pursuit of self-interest”; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) and behavior that is crime-like (smoking, promiscuous behavior, chronic unemployment) can be explained by one trait—an individual’s level of self-control. The theory centers around a few key assumptions: (1) crime is easy and exciting, (2) crime requires no special motive, and (3) crime occurs when there is an opportunity. Accordingly, people withstand the lure of crime via their self-control. Self-control, which is a time-stable trait, is developed in early childhood through effective parenting practices (socialization, monitoring, recognition of problematic behavior, and discipline). Studies that have examined the relationship between self-control and crime have generally been supportive, finding that individuals who have low levels of self-control are more likely to be criminal or delinquent. Likewise, research finds that a person’s risk of victimization has been linked to low self-control. Increases in victimization risk

for persons with low self-control are associated with their involvement in different forms of offending and association with peer delinquents, as well as more generally that they have a higher level of impulsivity (Piquero, MacDonald, Dobrin, Daigle, & Cullen, 2005).

Biosocial Explanations

Biosocial or genetic explanations for the victim–offender overlap is a fairly recent area of exploration. According to this perspective, victimization and offending are influenced by similar genetic factors that lead to an overlap between the two (Barnes & Beaver, 2012). To test this hypothesis, Vaske, Boisvert, and Wright (2012) used a twin study design to evaluate the influence of genetics on the victim–offender overlap. They compared the victimization and offending experiences of monozygotic (identical) twins to dizygotic (fraternal) twins. Because monozygotic twins share 100% of their genetic material, while fraternal twins only share 50% of their genetic material (making them no more genetically similar than other sibling pairs), one would expect that if the victim–offender overlap is driven, at least partially, by genetic factors, the overlap between offending and victimization would be greater for identical twins than fraternal twins. This is exactly what they found with approximately 20% to 40% of the correlation between violent victimization and delinquency/offending due to shared genetic factors (Vaske et al., 2012).

Theoretical Integration and the Victim–Offender Overlap*

Integrated theories pull together theories (sometimes in their entirety and sometimes in pieces) into broad explanations of offending. Recently these theories have been preferred because they highlight how a variety of different factors come together to explain crime. Integrated theories commonly incorporate concepts such as social bonds between individuals, social support, the influence of deviant peers, the ability to control others (or be controlled), family dynamics, and one's own personality characteristics. These theories provide a variety of different explanations of offending, from why certain groups of individuals might be involved in crime throughout their lives to why coercion might be crucial for recognizing why persons offend. There are relatively few integrated theories and most are relatively new. In addition, the majority only explain offending, with little attention given to victimization.

An example of one such theory is Agnew's (2005) integrated general theory of crime and delinquency. Agnew's integrated theory doesn't provide a new theoretical argument per se, but rather it organizes factors that influence offending into specific groupings, which he calls life domains. He proposes a total of five domains that focus on an individual's personality as well as on his or her connections to family, school, friends, and work. According to the theory, these domains have the greatest influence on offending when motivations to offend are high and restraints against offending are low. There is a growing body of evidence beginning to show support of this integrated theory.

Although Agnew (2005) does not focus directly on the victim–offender overlap in his integrated theory, there is reason to believe that the theory can explain why people might

**Note:* This section written by Jonathan A. Grubb.

be both victims and offenders. For instance, personality characteristics have been found to be significant for understanding why individuals offend and are victimized. The same can be found when considering factors related to a person's family, school, friends, and work environment. While not all factors described by Agnew explain why individuals might offend and be victimized, the overwhelming majority have been used to explain both experiences. What would be expected then would be that the life domains predict both why an individual offends and is victimized. Agnew would also suggest that victimization comes before offending, and it would serve as a significant motivation for an individual to offend.

To summarize, very few integrated theories have focused on victimization, with none known to examine the victim–offender overlap. One integrated theory that might explain the overlap is Agnew's (2005) integrated theory of crime and delinquency. Because the domains described have separately been used to understand victimization and offending, there is reason to believe they could explain why persons who offend are victimized and vice versa.

THE VICTIM–OFFENDER OVERLAP AND SPECIFIC TYPES OF VICTIMIZATION

The reasons why victimization may lead to participation in crime are not fully understood, but it may be that being victimized carries psychological consequences, such as depression, anxiety, or posttraumatic stress disorder, that can lead to coping through the use of alcohol or drugs. Victimization may also carry physical consequences, such as brain damage, that can further impede success later in life. Cognitive ability may also be tempered by maltreatment, particularly in childhood, which can hinder school performance. Behavior may also change as a result of being victimized. People may experience problems in their interpersonal relationships or become violent or aggressive. Whatever the reason, it is evident that victimization and offending are intimately intertwined. We now focus on examining the victim–offender overlap within specific types of victimization.

Homicide

Homicide (which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7) involves the killing of one human being by another. Wolfgang (1957) was one of the first to recognize the overlap between offending and victimization within homicide when he studied victim-precipitated homicides in Philadelphia. As discussed in Chapter 1, Wolfgang asserted that a victim can, at times, directly influence the outcome of a violent encounter through his or her own behavior. Defining victim-precipitated homicide as an incident in which “the role of the victim is characterized by his having been the first in the homicide drama to use physical force directed against his subsequent slayer” (p. 73), Wolfgang (1957) found that slightly over one-quarter of the homicides in his Philadelphia study were victim precipitated. Both concepts, the victim–offender overlap and victim precipitation, highlight the demographic and behavioral similarities between victims and offenders (Muftić & Hunt, 2013).

Following in this tradition, several researchers have explored the victim–offender overlap within homicide. All together, the homicide research demonstrates that that anywhere up to 50% of homicide victims had previous offending records and that homicide victims and their killers share many similar demographic characteristics, structural environments, and risky behaviors, supporting the victim–offender overlap thesis (Broidy, Daday, Crandall, Sklar, & Jost, 2006; Dobrin, 2001; Ezell & Tanner-Smith, 2009; Muftić & Hunt, 2013; Pizarro, Zgoba, & Jennings, 2011). For instance, in one of the first empirical attempts to determine whether previous offending increases homicide victimization risk, Dobrin (2001) compared homicide victims to nonvictims and found that prior offending was a significant predictor of homicide victimization even after controlling for demographic and socioeconomic factors. In another study, Pizarro et al. (2011) reported that criminally involved victims and offenders were more likely to be involved in homicides associated with criminal events (e.g., drug-related homicides) than victims and suspects with lesser degrees of criminal involvement.

Bullying

Bullying is the intentional infliction of verbal or physical injury repeatedly over time by a more powerful perpetrator over a less powerful victim (Olweus, 1993a). DeCamp and Newby (2015) found that adolescents who experienced repeated bullying victimization were more likely to self-report engaging in assault, theft, and vandalism compared to adolescents who had not experienced repeated bullying. Additionally, male bullying victims were more likely to report a gang affiliation than nonbullied males, and female bullying victims were more likely to report underage alcohol use and marijuana use compared to nonbullied females. Both male and female bullying victims were more likely to report having been suspended from school relative to nonbullied adolescents. Collectively, DeCamp and Newby's (2015) findings demonstrate that childhood bullying victims exhibit a greater risk for offending than adolescents who have not experienced childhood bullying.

In the aftermath of high-profile school shooting incidents like the one that occurred at Columbine High School, many laypeople and news commentators allege a connection between bullying and school violence. Mears, Moon, and Thielo (2017) contend that individuals subscribe to this assumed association because it appears intuitive at face value and restores a sense of control by suggesting that future school shooting incidents can be prevented by addressing bullying behaviors. Although school shootings are portrayed as common events that occur with increasing regularity throughout the United States, Mears and colleagues (2017) argue that they are historically rare and remain so today. Consequently, scholars possess few data points to empirically identify warning signs for who is most at risk for becoming a school shooter. In the absence of empirical evidence, many people fall back on lay understandings to explain the causes of school shootings, including bullying. In reality, school shootings are likely the culmination of many factors working in tandem with each other, and people who experience bullying overwhelmingly do not go on to commit a school shooting.

VICTIMOLOGY IN THE NEWS

SCHOOL SHOOTER WANTED TO “TEACH EVERYONE A LESSON” ABOUT BULLYING

Caleb Sharpe, a 15-year-old sophomore at Freeman High School in Rockford, Washington, was described as “nice and funny and weird” by his friends. Besides exhibiting an interest in documentaries about school shootings such as Columbine and Sandy Hook, Sharpe uploaded videos of himself reenacting mock scenarios involving guns to the popular video-hosting website YouTube. At school, Sharpe regularly attended meetings with the school counselor for suicidal ideations.

On September 12, 2017, Sharpe flipped a coin to determine if he should conduct an attack at school. The coin landed heads up, signaling that he should. The next morning, on September 13, Sharpe loaded an AR-15 semiautomatic rifle and a pistol from his father’s safe into a golf bag and boarded the school bus. Once inside the school, Sharpe drew the AR-15 from the duffel bag and tried to open fire, but the rifle jammed. He discarded the rifle in favor of the pistol. At this point, Sharpe fatally shot fellow classmate Sam

Strahan, a former friend from whom he had grown apart over time. Sharpe then shot wildly into the ceiling and a group of approximately 15 students by the lockers until the pistol also jammed. A school janitor and resource officer detained Sharpe until police arrived.

According to a police affidavit, Sharpe acknowledged that Strahan had bullied him, but denied plotting to kill Strahan. Instead, the opportunity occurred by happenstance. Sharpe told police that his actions were motivated by a general desire to “come to the school to teach everyone a lesson about what happens when you bully others.” As such, Sharpe’s message communicated that bullying is incredibly harmful to victims, and not all victims have access to adequate coping resources. Bullying victims who struggle to cope may engage in self-harm behaviors or experience suicidal ideation. Other bullying victims who struggle to cope may lash out with violence toward others. As was the case with Caleb Sharpe, some bullying victims may engage in *both* sets of behaviors.

Sources: Blankstein, A., & Siemaszko, C. (2017, September 14). Washington school shooting suspect wanted to teach bullies a “lesson,” *NBC News*. Retrieved June 4, 2018, from <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/washington-school-shooting-suspect-wanted-teach-bullies-lesson-n801346>; Clouse, T. (2017, September 27). Accused Freeman school shooter told detectives that everything went “exactly as intended.” *The Spokesman-Review*. Retrieved June 4, 2018, from <http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2017/sep/27/prosecutors-add-more-than-50-new-assault-charges-a/#/0>; Geranios, N. K. (2017, September 14). Victim told suspect in Washington school shooting: I knew you would “shoot up the school,” *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved June 4, 2018, from <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-washington-school-shooting-20170914-story.html>.

Intimate Partner Violence

On March 9, 1977, Francine Hughes, a housewife from Michigan, killed her ex-husband by pouring gasoline around the bed where he slept and starting it on fire. Hughes, who had endured over a decade of abuse at the hands of her husband, was found not guilty by reason of insanity. Hughes became the poster child for battered women (and the battered woman defense), and her story was recounted in the 1984 book *The Burning Bed* and later a TV

movie by the same name. Country artist Martina McBride had a huge hit with her single “Independence Day” in which she tells a very similar story of a woman who escapes abuse by setting her house ablaze with her abusive partner inside. A recent documentary, *The Perfect Victim*, follows four separate Missouri women—Carlene Borden, Ruby Jamerson, Shirley Lute, and Tanya Mitchell—who were convicted of killing their husbands after experiencing years of horrific abuse.

Despite numerous examples in the media of the overlap between victimization and offending, especially among female victims who exact revenge on their abusers (take, for example, *Kill Bill*, *Thelma & Louise*, and *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*), only recently has the victim–offender overlap been applied to the empirical study of intimate partner violence (IPV). As discussed in Chapter 9, intimate partner violence entails violence that occurs between individuals in a current or former intimate relationship (e.g., husband/wife, boyfriend/girlfriend, dating partner). The lack of attention given to the victim–offender overlap within IPV may be because the victim–offender overlap centers around the argument that victims and offenders are *similar*; however, most people view IPV victims and IPV perpetrators as *dissimilar*. This is due, in part, to feminist researchers’ contention that IPV is a unique crime influenced by patriarchy and sexism. Yet, many feminist scholars have acknowledged that there is more than one type of IPV. Predominantly, M. P. Johnson (2011) has identified three major types. They include situational couple violence, intimate terrorism, and violent resistance. **Situational couple violence** is the most common type of IPV, which occurs when conflict in a relationship escalates to violence, but the violence is not used by either partner as a control tactic, and men and women are equally likely to be perpetrators and victims of this type of IPV. **Intimate terrorism**, also referred to as battering or coercive control, while not the most common type of IPV, is the type likely to be experienced by women who seek assistance from the police or domestic violence shelters and involves a pattern of coercive control that includes the partner’s use of physical violence and related tactics (emotional abuse or economic abuse) as a means of maintaining control. The last type, **violent resistance** (also referred to as defensive violence), involves women fighting back against intimate terrorism. What Francine Hughes did to her ex-husband is an example of violent resistance.

Johnson’s typology lays the groundwork for the possibility that like other types of violent crime, victim–offenders exist within intimate partner violence, particularly within IPV that involves common couple violence and violent resistance. For instance, feminist researchers have long contended that when women perpetuate IPV, they do so defensively as opposed to offensively. Research that has explored the motivations behind women’s use of violence against an intimate partner finds that their motivations are typically more defensive in nature, with most women reporting assaulting their intimate partners as a means of self-defense or retaliation for their own victimization (Henning, Renauer, & Holdford, 2006).

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Using official police data, Muftić, Finn, and Marsh (2015) examined the overlap between victimization and offending within officially recorded incidents of intimate partner violence (IPV) by taking into consideration an individual's role in the initial IPV incident (either victim or offender) and then his or her role in further officially recorded IPV incidents during an 18- to 30-month follow-up period. Individuals were then categorized into four distinct groups: victims (IPV victims in all officially recorded incidents on file), persistent offenders (IPV offenders in all incidents),

desistent offenders (IPV offender in original IPV incident with no subsequent IPV offending recorded), or victim–offenders (IPV victims who later became IPV offenders or IPV offenders who later became IPV victims). Taking into consideration an individual's behavior during the follow-up period, results indicated that among the 1,256 individuals, victim–offenders comprised roughly one-quarter of the sample and that men and women were equally represented in this category.

Source: Partially reprinted from Muftić, L. R., Finn, M. A., & Marsh, E. (2015). The victim–offender overlap, intimate partner violence, and sex: Assessing differences among exclusive victims, exclusive offenders, and victim–offenders. *Crime & Delinquency*, 61(7), 899–926.

Special Case: The Role of Childhood Victimization in Offending and Victimization in Adulthood

Being victimized may be related to offending in ways that are not directly tied to retaliation or part of a risky lifestyle. In fact, being victimized at one point in life may increase the likelihood that a person will engage in delinquency and crime later in life. This link has been found especially in individuals who are abused during childhood. As discussed in Chapter 10 on victimization that occurs at the beginning and end of life, those who are victimized as children are significantly more likely than those who do not experience child abuse to be arrested in adulthood (Widom, 2000) or to engage in violence and property offending (Menard, 2002). This is showcased in the story of Terrance Williams at the beginning of this chapter.

The effect of maltreatment on crime and delinquency may be gendered in that, in retrospective studies of offenders, the relationship between child maltreatment and offending appears to be more relevant for females than males. In fact, female inmates reported more childhood maltreatment than did male inmates (McClellan, Farabee, & Crouch, 1997). Research has also found that a common precursor to entry into sex work, as a prostitute or sex trafficking victim, is physical and sexual abuse during childhood (J. Campbell et al., 2003; H. Wilson & Widom, 2010). And while victimization may originate in childhood, it doesn't appear to end there, with sexually exploited females reporting extensive violent victimization (Briere & Spinazzola, 2005; Farley et al., 2003; Muftić & Finn, 2013; Zimmerman et al., 2008) and offending (M. Finn, Muftić, & Marsh, 2014) across

their lifetimes. Refer to the section “Special Case: Prostitution Courts” for an innovative approach designed to address the unique needs of prostitutes by addressing their victimization histories in an effort to reduce recidivism.

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

THE INCIDENCE OF CHILD ABUSE IN SERIAL KILLERS

Serial killers attract a substantial amount of attention not only in the media but also within academia for the heinous acts that they commit. One fairly common question asked is, To what extent do serial killers have a history of abuse? Mitchell and Aamodt (2005) attempted to answer this question when they examined the prevalence of childhood physical, sexual, and psychological abuse among 50 U.S.-born serial killers. Results from their study indicated that a significant portion of serial killers sampled had been maltreated in general (68%), with psychological

abuse the most common (50%), followed by physical (36%) and sexual abuse (26%), and to a lesser extent neglect (18%). Only a minority of serial killers reported no type of abuse (32%). Furthermore, their research found that serial killers were more likely to have experienced child abuse than individuals from the general population. A more recent study by Keatley, Golightly, Shephard, Yaksic, and Reid (2018) reported that childhood abuse was the most common childhood experience present among serial killers' life histories.

Source: Adapted from Mitchell, H., & Aamodt, M. G. (2005). The incidence of child abuse in serial killers. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 20(1), 40–47.

Special Case: Prostitution Courts

For the criminal justice system, women engaged in prostitution represent a complex dichotomy. On one hand, females engaged in prostitution are viewed as offenders, involved in the selling of sex. On the other hand, females engaged in prostitution have commonly reported histories of various forms of abuse, running away from home and becoming involved in prostitution and offending as a method of survival. Moreover, they may have been forced or coerced into prostitution against their will, commonly referred to as sex trafficking. Female sex workers are often differentiated as victims or offenders based upon the amount of agency they are able to exert, with sexually trafficked women having been conceived as victims, while prostitutes have been portrayed as offenders (M. Finn et al., 2014). The distinction of prostitutes as victims or offenders presents difficulties for how the criminal justice system should treat these persons, with prostitutes identifying dissatisfaction with their treatment by police and court officials (Shdaimah & Wiechelt, 2012). However, recently a specific set of courts and programs has served as a positive outlet for handling prostitution.

Prostitution courts and diversionary programs have emerged as a method to reduce recidivism associated with sex work and to cut down on the number of sexually exploited individuals cycling through the criminal justice system. Such programs draw attention to the heart of the problem, questioning why individuals are continually engaged in prostitution (e.g., being forced, supporting a drug habit) and what avenues might be beneficial

to help them exit prostitution (e.g., financial, social, and emotional assistance). A few of these programs include: Services to Access Resources and Safety (STARS), Salt Lake City’s Prostitution Diversion Project (PDP), Phoenix Prostitution Diversion Program, Baltimore City’s Specialized Prostitution Diversion program (SPD), and the Survivors Acquiring Freedom and Empowerment (SAFE) Court located in Harris County (Houston), Texas. These programs have included a variety of components focusing on assisting sex workers through education, counseling, and drug and alcohol treatment. Moreover, these programs have also been utilized to reduce public health concerns (e.g., AIDS) as well as to educate volunteers and individuals working in these programs about prostitution (Wahab, 2006).

Some evaluations of prostitution courts have found that prostitutes who have completed a diversionary program are less likely to recidivate for prostitution compared to prostitutes not involved in the diversionary program (Roe-Sepowitz, Hickie, Pérez Loubert, & Egan, 2011). Other evaluations have failed to find any difference in recidivism between prostitution court participants, participants given probation, and participants who declined involvement in the prostitution court (Muftić & Updegrave, 2018). Nevertheless, sex workers have reported many benefits to these types of courts and programs, including feeling empowered as well as socially supported, especially when the persons assisting them were former sex workers. A prime example of the benefits of diversionary programs is evident in the story of Lizzie (read the box below).

With the assistance of the prostitution court, Lizzie was able to move into a shelter and acquire meaningful employment. Overall, prostitution courts and diversionary programs for sex workers represent a positive alternative to incarceration that tap into the etiology of why individuals are involved in prostitution, with a focus on victimization.

CASE STUDY

LIZZIE’S STORY

Lizzie was sexually abused from age 2 to 12 by her stepfather and others, and physically and emotionally abused by her mother. Lizzie was 12 when her mother kicked her out. With no money, no food, and nowhere to go, Lizzie became involved with a pimp and entered the life of prostitution. Twenty years later, Lizzie was homeless, struggling with addiction, and had been arrested over 100 times.

For many experts who work with women and girls in prostitution, Lizzie’s story is typical. “The multiple experiences of sexual abuse at such a young age ingrained in her a belief that she was worth nothing; this is very common with survivors of childhood sexual abuse,” said Miriam Goodman,

clinical director at the Midtown Community Court. Midtown was the first court to treat Lizzie as a victim. The court linked her with mental health and career counseling and helped her get on a path to leave the life of prostitution.

“What made the Midtown Community Court different from the other courts that I’ve been to is that they offer individual therapy,” said Lizzie. “The social workers in the STARS program . . . helped me realize that I needed to make changes in my life.”

Lizzie got a job and moved into a reunification shelter for mothers and children. “With the help and the support that I had with Midtown Community Court, I made some wonderful steps,” Lizzie said.

Source: Reprinted from Schweig, Malangone, & Goodman (n.d.). *Prostitution diversion programs*. Retrieved from http://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/documents/CI_Prostitution%207.5.12%20PDF.pdf.

SUMMARY

- The victim–offender overlap can be conceptualized as a victim who is an offender and vice versa.
- As indicated by recent research, approximately 84% of published studies on the victim–offender overlap since the 1960s have shown support for the concept.
- The victim–offender overlap has been found internationally in Western and non-Western countries.
- The victim–offender overlap has been found for different forms of offending and victimization including those related to violence, property, and substance use. The overlap is most notably exhibited in homicide and intimate partner violence.
- The homicide literature indicates that 50% of victims had previous criminal records.
- Intimate partner violence typologies can be used for understanding the victim–offender overlap.
- Victims and offenders have similar demographic characteristics, commonly being black and living in urban areas.
- In general, involvement in a criminal event increases the chances of victimization and offending.
- The literature has suggested there are three groups of individuals involved in criminal events: victims, offenders, and victim–offenders.
- There are multiple perspectives why an individual who is victimized might offend (and vice versa), including the dynamic causal perspective and population heterogeneity perspective.
- The dynamic causal and population heterogeneity perspectives attribute social, environmental, and biological factors to explain the overlap.
- While integrated theories have not explicitly tested the overlap, there is substantial reason to believe that they could adequately explain both victimization and offending.
- Victimization early in life might influence delinquency in childhood as well as offending and victimization later in life. This is most relevant for females compared to males, and it is common for victims of sexual abuse.
- Prostitutes can be conceptualized as victim–offenders, in that they commonly have a history of abuse (victimization), which influences them to run away from home and become involved in prostitution (offending) as a method of survival.
- Prostitution courts and diversionary programs have produced positive results in reducing recidivism of prostitutes by providing assistance in understanding why individuals might be involved in prostitution and what can be done to them to exit prostitution.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Should offenders who have had a history of victimization be treated differently by the legal system than individuals who do not have a history of victimization, and why?
2. Which of the following is more likely, and why: (1) victimization is more likely to come prior to offending, or (2) offending is more likely to come prior to victimization?

3. What interventions (aside from the one discussed) might be used to reduce the impact of childhood victimization on offending and victimization later in life?
4. If the population heterogeneity perspective is accurate, and time-stable personality and environmental characteristics influence the overlap, what could be done to reduce victimization and offending?

KEY TERMS

victim–offender overlap 47	victim–offenders 47	situational couple violence 56
principle of homogamy 47	dynamic causal perspective 48	intimate terrorism 56
victims 47	population heterogeneity	violent resistance 56
offenders 47	perspective 51	

INTERNET RESOURCE

Prostitution Courts, National Drug Center Court Resource Center (http://www.ndcrc.org/category/types-courts/prostitution-courts)	Contained within the National Drug Center Court Resource Center database, this compilation of reports provides information on prostitution courts and other problem-solving programs.
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