

Theories and Risk of Criminal Victimization

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The risk of violent victimization is related to several factors. Individuals' vulnerability to violent crime varies with their demographic or personal characteristics, as well as with their participation in activities and social networks and their use of public places, which can increase their exposure to predation. Since 1937, theories of victimization have explored the dynamic interactions between victims and offenders as well as the victim or offender behaviors that culminate in violent outcomes (Tobolowsky, 2000).

Theories of victimization that focus on victim precipitation and involvement have been roundly criticized as "victim blaming," especially by early victim advocates who sought to eliminate the pernicious stigmatization associated with sexual violence (Campbell & Raja, 1999). Nonetheless, theories of victimization have long contributed to the discourse on victimology and can further knowledge regarding the causes of violent victimization and strategies for its prevention (Doerner & Lab, 2015). Such perspectives argue that "choices of where to go, what to do, and how to proceed (even when made innocently) influence the chances of becoming a victim. Recognition of this process may provide insight into personal offenses, like homicide and assault" (Doerner & Lab, 2015, p. 56).

Demographic Characteristics

Age. A wealth of data from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) has demonstrated a consistent and strong inverse relationship between age and criminal victimization

(BJS, 2008). Rates of personal crimes peak among those aged 16 to 24 and are lowest among those 65 and older. In particular, rates of violent crime victimization (e.g., robbery and aggravated assault) are much higher for younger people than for older people; the difference is less pronounced for property offenses. The victimization and offending rates for homicide both peak for young people between the ages of 18 and 24. More than one-third of homicide victims and nearly one-half of homicide perpetrators are younger than age 25.

Violent victimization in the late 1980s and early 90s was concentrated disproportionately among persons younger than age 24, particularly among teenagers (Lauritsen, 2009). The homicide rates of adolescents and young adults increased steeply from the late 1980s to the early 90s, with a peak in 1993, demonstrating that “lethal violence in the late 1980s and early 90s [was] primarily a youth phenomenon” (Lauritsen, 2009, p. 74). Between 1999 and 2008, homicide rates were stable for people aged 35 to 49 and those older than age 50 (Cooper & Smith, 2011). From 2002 to 2011, the homicide rate was highest among young adults ages 18 to 24; from 2002 to 2011, young adults also experienced the greatest decline (22%) in the homicide rate from 15.2 to 11.9 per 100,000 residents (Smith & Cooper, 2013).

Race and Ethnicity. Prior to 2003, the NCVS distinguished between only White and Black for reporting purposes. From 1973 to 2006, the violent crime rate among Blacks was double the rate among Whites. This differential has appeared during periods of increases and decreases, as well as peaks and troughs, in victimization data. For example, the rate of violent victimization among Blacks in 1981 (a peak year) was roughly 4,000 per 100,000 residents; among Whites, it was roughly 2,000 per 100,000 residents. The rate of violent victimization among Blacks in 2002 (a trough year) was roughly 1,200 per 100,000 residents; among Whites, it was roughly 600 per 100,000 residents (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008).

Blacks have been consistently over-represented as both homicide victims and homicide offenders, with victimization rates six times higher and offending rates eight times higher than those of Whites. Young (age 14 to 24) Black men constitute 1% of the general population but 16% of homicide victims and 27% of homicide offenders (since 1994), declining from a high of 35% of homicide offenders in 1993. Black men are also significantly more likely than White men to be victims of drug-related homicides. Homicide, however, is intraracial: 84% of White victims are killed by White offenders, and 93% of Black victims are killed by Black offenders (Cooper & Smith, 2011). Black men lose more years of life before age 65 to homicide than to heart disease, which is the nation's leading cause of death (Heller et al., 2013). The homicide gap between Blacks and Whites is 5 to 1 (Lauritsen, 2009) and between Hispanics and Whites is 2 to 1 (Langley & Sugarmann, 2014).

The UCR database on violent crime contains no information about ethnicity; nonetheless, ethnic differences can be discerned from the NCVS (Lauritsen & Heimer, 2010). For example, in 2013, with respect to the percentage of the population within a category of ethnicity, persons of two or more races experienced the most violent crime (excluding homicide) at approximately 4%, accounting for 114,190 crime victims, followed by American Indians or Alaska Natives at approximately 3%, accounting for 38,310 violent crime victims. Blacks (1.3%) and Hispanics (1.3%) experienced slightly higher percentage rates than Whites (1.1%), accounting for 430,380, 540,130, and 1.9 million violent crime victims, respectively. In 2004, Hispanics (1.2%) experienced a lower prevalence rate of violent victimization than both Whites (1.5%) and Blacks (1.7%). The rates of violent and serious violent crime in 2013 were highest among Blacks (2,510 per 100,000 residents and 950 per 100,000 residents, respectively), followed by Hispanics (2,480 per 100,000 residents and 750 per 100,000 residents, respectively) and Whites (2,220 per

100,000 residents and 680 per 100,000 residents, respectively). By far, the rates of violent and serious violent crime in 2013 were highest among American Indian/Alaska Native (5,630 per 100,000 residents and 3,900 per 100,000 residents, respectively) (Truman & Langton, 2014).

Gender. Men commit more than 70% of all types of crimes (Smith, 2012) and also fall prey disproportionately to victimization. With the exceptions of rape and intimate partner violence, the rate of violent victimization is substantially higher among men than among women. The gender differential in violent victimization is greatest in the youngest age category (ages 12 to 24), begins to diminish after age 25, starts to converge after age 35, and becomes nearly equivalent at age 65 and older (Laub, 1997). Men are overwhelmingly the victims (77%) and perpetrators (90%) of homicide. The homicide rate is three times higher among men than women, and the rate of offending is nine times higher among men than women; however, women are substantially more likely than men to be victims of intimate partner violence (64%) and sex-related murder (82%) (Cooper & Smith, 2011). The gender gap has steadily narrowed in terms of both violent crime and serious violent crime rates from 2004 to 2013 (Truman & Langton, 2014). From 2002 to 2011, the homicide rates among men and women declined by 16% and 20%, respectively (Cooper & Smith, 2013).

Income. The risk of violent victimization rises rapidly with extreme poverty and disadvantage (Lauritsen, 2009). Also at higher risk for violence are adults living alone and parenting their children alone (single parents) (Lauritsen, 2009). The relationship between economic disadvantage and violence has been consistently found in cross-sectional research at various levels of analyses (e.g., states, census tracts, and neighborhoods) (e.g., Land, McCall, Cohen, 1990; Land, McCall, Cohen, 1991; Lauritsen, 2001; Lauritsen & Heimer, 2010; Lauritsen & White, 2001; Peterson, Krivo, & Hangan, 2006; Rosenfeld & Fornago, 2007). Strains on

neighborhood economies and corresponding family incomes have independent effects on individuals' risk of victimization (Lauritsen, 2001) and increase the likelihood of intimate partner violence (Benson, Fox, De Maris, & Van Wyk, 2003).

Research has indicated that people in lower income brackets are more likely to be victimized than people in higher income brackets. For example, people with annual household incomes of \$7,500 are more than three times more likely to be a victim of robbery and more than four times more likely to be a victim of aggravated assault than those with annual household incomes of \$75,000 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). The violent crime victimization rate in 2010 was three times higher for people with annual household incomes of less than \$15,000 than for those with annual household incomes greater than \$75,000 (Kearney, Harris, Jacome, & Parke, 2014). An evaluation of the Moving for Opportunities Program demonstrated that the provision of resources to lift residents out of oppressive poverty reduced victimization rates by more than 15% among program participants (Katz, Kling, & Liebman, 2000).

During the years 2008 to 2012, people living at or below the federal poverty level for households were more than twice as likely to be a victim of violent crime as those living in the highest-income-bracket households (3,980 per 100,000 residents versus 1,690 per 100,000 residents, respectively). People living in poor households experienced serious violent victimization at a rate three times higher than those living in the highest-income-bracket households (1,520 versus 450 per 100,000 residents, respectively). In addition, people at or below the federal poverty level were more likely to be victims of stranger- and firearm-related violent victimization. The overall inverse relationship between household income and violent victimization (2008 to 2012) was the same for Blacks and Whites; however, the rate of violent victimization for Hispanics was invariant across income levels (Harrell et al., 2014).

Location of Residence. Violent crimes are more likely to occur in major metropolitan areas (big cities) than in suburban and rural areas. In 2012, for example, the rate of serious violent victimization in urban areas was more than double that in rural areas (Truman, Langton, & Planty, 2013). Homicides are most likely to occur in large cities, particularly those with a population of 1 million or more (Cooper & Smith, 2011). From 2002 to 2011, cities of 100,000 or more residents experienced the largest decline (23%) in homicide rates, compared with smaller communities (i.e., those with fewer than 100,000 residents) (Smith & Cooper, 2013). The highest percentages of violent victimization occur in the South, followed by the Western, Midwestern, and Northeastern regions of the country. The proportion of murders that occur in the South (43%) was more than three times greater than the proportion in the Northeast (12%) (FBI, 2006). However, in 2013, the rates of violent and serious violent victimization were highest in the Western region and lowest in the Southern region (Truman & Langton, 2014).

Theories of Victimization

For more than 70 years, theories of victimology have explored victims' roles in violent criminal incidents. Unlike criminological theories, which underscore the causes of crime in terms of offender characteristics and motivations, victimological theories postulate that victim characteristics and motivations can affect the risk of victimization overall, as well as the instigation and culmination of specific criminal encounters. In such theories, victims exert varying degrees of influence over the occurrences and eventualities of criminal attacks. Thus, these theories have assumed that the offender-victim dyad can create or alter episodes of criminal attack through a process of shared responsibility. As discussed below, such frameworks have been subjected to fierce criticism due to their emphasis on victim blaming (Karmen, 1991). Other theories of victimology have examined sociological and environmental factors that can affect

victimization risk at different times and places without assigning responsibility to victims for contributing to their own harm.

Early Typologies of Crime Victims. From the late 1930s through the 1950s, Mendelsohn and his colleagues (most notably von Hentig, 1948) “explored the relationships between victims and offenders . . . [and] developed victim typologies that identified victim characteristics that might increase a person’s risk of victimization . . . or even contribute to or precipitate the victimization” (Tobolowsky, 2000, p. 18). Such frameworks became the foundation for victim precipitation theory and were considered an improvement over the static, one-sided, perpetrator-centric explanations of traditional criminologists (Fattah, 1979).

Mendelsohn (1956) created hierarchical levels or classes of victim culpability, ranging from the “completely innocent victim” to the “victim as guilty as the offender” to the “victim guiltier than the offender.” Based on Mendelsohn’s formulations, Wolfgang (1958) studied patterns in criminal homicide, which suggested that victims played a major role in their own killing by being “the first to show and use a deadly weapon, to strike a blow in an altercation—in short, the first to commence the interplay or resort to physical violence” (p. 252). In Wolfgang’s (1958) investigation, more than one-fourth of the homicides began with a dispute that culminated in death. He also found that many of the homicides in his research involved non-strangers as well as the use of alcohol. Wolfgang even speculated that some homicide victims were actually suicidal and provoked their killers in order to fulfill a death wish (Wolfgang, 1959).

Schafer (1968) built upon the preceding theories to create more explicit and detailed gradations of victim precipitation. The lowest degree of victim culpability or contribution to the victimization involves instances of no victim responsibility (innocent target of offender). Other categories ascribe greater responsibility to victims with respect to their role in facilitating the

crime, such as precipitative victims (e.g., when the offender is reacting to victim's behaviors) and self-victimizing victims (e.g., people who gamble, use drugs, or engage in the sex trade). One influential study of victim precipitation involved a national sample of police reports and defined victim precipitation, for example in the case of aggravated assault, as "occurring when the victim was the first to use either physical force or insinuating language and gestures against the subsequent attacker" (Curtis, 1974, p. 598). The research found that victim precipitation was most common in incidents of homicide, followed by aggravated assault and robbery.

Lifestyle Exposure Theory. Lifestyle exposure theory aligns with the preceding discussion regarding the relationship between demographic characteristics and victimization risk (see above). Indeed, the lifestyle exposure model is comprised of variations in demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, race, and income). Such differences affect people's lifestyles, which encompass "routine daily activities, both vocational activities (work, school, keeping house, etc.) and leisure activities" (Hindelang, Gottfredson, & Garofalo, 1978, p. 241) (see below). Several explanatory models predict that demographic characteristics are related to lifestyle choices, which affect the risk of criminal victimization (e.g., Hindelang, Gottfredson, & Garofalo, 1978; Kennedy & Forde, 1990).

Specifically, lifestyle factors that can affect the risk of violent victimization include the kinds of activities people engage in and the "where and when" of those activities (see Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). For example, frequenting bars in high-crime areas and exiting them alone and intoxicated in the middle of the night are a recipe for becoming a victim of armed robbery or some other type of violent crime. Taxi drivers and musicians often work late hours in high-crime areas—lifestyle factors that might explain their high rates of robbery. In contrast, spending quiet evenings in a secure suburban home and reading a book by the fireplace is likely to keep a

person out of harm's way. Elementary school teachers and college professors have an affinity for activities that keep them in safe environments, which might explain their lower likelihood of being victims of robbery (cf., Fattah, 1991).

Between these extremes is a continuum of risk that varies with individual characteristics, behaviors, and the settings in which people interact with others. Unstructured time in public (especially at night), attenuated ties to family, school, and work, and attachments to criminal subgroups and cultures create fallow ground for criminal activities and victimization (Hindelang et al., 1978). In addition, alcohol and drug use, coupled with structural variables in a community that create places for offenders to gather with little or no guardianship, also increase the risk of violent victimization (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010) (see below).

Routine Activities Theory. Routine activities theory and lifestyle theory are obviously linked (Meir & Miethe, 1993). With a focus on the social ecology of crime, the routine activities theory posits that the concurrence of three elements increases the likelihood of violent victimization: motivated (likely) offenders, suitable and attractive targets (people and objects), and the absence of capable guardians whose presence or watchfulness could prevent the occurrence of a crime (Cohen & Felson, 1979). The risk of victimization increases when offenders and targets are in proximity to each other, providing offenders with ready and practicable opportunities for offenses. The likelihood of victimization also increases when offenders are undeterred by other persons who might intervene or identify them and when they have easy egress from the scene. Together, these conditions facilitate the commission of a criminal act by creating a perfect storm for victimization.

With respect to victimogenesis (cause of victimization), routine activities theory emphasizes the probability of certain individuals (prospective victims) traversing certain

locations at certain times and under certain circumstances, which leads them into contact with certain people (prospective offenders) (Hindelang et al., 1978; Meier & Miethe, 1993). The risk of becoming a victim is heavily dependent upon the number of hours spent outside the home; the frequency of leaving the home in the evening and returning late at night, including being a habitué of bars and other alcohol-serving establishments; and the likelihood of contacts with neighborhood offenders (Killias, 1989). Routine activities theory emphasizes situational elements, namely, the opportunity for committing a crime and the lack of informal controls among potential victims, and also in their personal environment (Miethe & Meier, 1994). “Taken together, a routine activity approach predicts the greatest risks for predatory crime when potential victims have high target suitability (i.e., high visibility, accessibility, and attractiveness) and low levels of guardianship” (Meir & Miethe, 1993, p. 474).

According to research on routine activities theory, the precipitous increase in crime between 1960 and 1970 was attributable to an increase in suitable targets due to the purchase of more durable goods, such as cars, bicycles, and stereos, and the proliferation of unoccupied homes during the daytime. The increase in durable goods was accompanied by a decrease in capable guardians, as more women joined the workforce and more families engaged in leisure activities outside of the home. The existence of more empty homes created greater opportunities for burglaries. Similarly, the presence of more women in public rendered them more vulnerable to criminal victimization (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Numerous other studies have found some empirical support for routine activities as an explanatory framework for crimes, such as residential burglary and theft (Cohen & Cantor, 1980), and for urban homicides (Messner & Tardiff, 1985), as well as repeat victimizations (Gottfredson, 1981).

Fattah’s Theory of Victimization and the Structured-Choice Model. Fattah’s (1991)

theory of criminal victimization risk consists of 10 basic factors that include the dimensions (and convergences) of person, place, and time. The model also attributes the risk of victimization to behaviors that can be provocative, which increases the likelihood of violent crime, or negligent, which in turn increases the likelihood of property crime. Scenarios that are more or less conducive to crime are determined by personal characteristics that are correlated with victimization, such as age and gender; the communities in which people live, such as high- or low-crime neighborhoods; the places in which people socialize and the times when they are there, such as “places of public entertainment, where the risks of becoming a victim are higher than at work or at home” (Fattah, 1991, p. 19); and the individual’s inclination to engage in high-risk behaviors, such as soliciting a prostitute, purchasing illegal drugs, or participating in other markets for illicit goods and services, and interacting with known offenders. The dynamic, interactive perspective of victim precipitation attributes no blame to victim behavior and contains no normative or value judgments, such as victim guilt or responsibility (Fattah, 1994).

Fattah’s (1991) theory has never been translated into a well-specified and testable conceptual framework (cf. Smith & Bouffard, 2014). Nonetheless, it aligns with the structural choice model of victimization, which integrates lifestyle exposure theory with routine activities theory (Miethe & Meier, 1990). The model contains macrodynamic factors, such as the high- and low-crime neighborhoods in Fattah’s theory, which constitute a criminal opportunity structure for victimization by bringing together victims and offenders in physical proximity with one another. Residents in areas with lower criminal opportunity structures are at lower risk for predatory victimization, and vice versa. These factors are combined with microlevel processes—the lifestyle exposure components of Fattah’s theory—that determine the accessibility of

victimization targets. Offenders rationally select targets as a function of net rewards (risk versus benefit ratios) (Meir & Miethe, 1993).

Typologies of Victim Accountability. Karmen's (2004) typology of victim accountability consists of six victim categories that are defined by increasing blameworthiness or shared responsibility, ranging from complete innocence to facilitation, precipitation, provocation, or active participation in a crime. More germane to violent crime victims are Karmen's (2006) dimensions of victim involvement in the incident: repeat victims, facilitating victims, precipitating victims, and innocent victims. Repeat victims routinely place themselves in risky situations. The following example uses aggravated assault in a bar setting.

A young man who continues to frequent a bar, despite its reputation as a setting for violent altercations and his previous experiences of being assaulted there, is an example of a repeat victim. With respect to victim facilitation, victims are partially responsible for their attacks because they "unknowingly, carelessly, negligently, foolishly, and unwillingly make it easier for the criminal to commit the crime" (Karmen, 2006, p. 101). A young man frequents a bar on an evening in which he will be in contact with a crowd of men who have threatened to assault him if he returns on the day they are there is an example of a facilitating victim. A young man frequents a bar, becomes intoxicated, and verbally threatens and pushes a patron. He is involved in a serious altercation in which he initiated the brawl; this is an example of a precipitating victim. Finally, a young man walks past a bar during the afternoon. He is attacked from behind unprovoked by one of the patrons emerging from the establishment and is clearly an innocent victim.

Social Disorganization Theory. Apart from individual differences, community-level factors (e.g., poverty, unemployment, income inequality, residential instability, and percentage

of single-parent households) can exert pressure on residents to engage in delinquent and criminal behaviors, which increase the risk of violent victimization (e.g., Bursik & Webb, 1982). These factors are captured in social disorganization theory, which originated in the seminal research of the Chicago School of Sociology (Bulmer, 1984). Among a wealth of major empirical findings regarding the causes of delinquency and criminality, Chicago School researchers found that disorganized areas marked by divergent values and transitional populations produce criminality (e.g., Shaw & McKay, 1972).

Social disorganization theory suggests that violent victimization is more likely to occur in areas where social control has deteriorated and neighborhood homogeneity and solidarity have diminished (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993). Racial inequality creates social isolation and concentrations of truly disadvantaged residents. In such communities, social organization is weakened, family cohesiveness is diminished, and structural barriers deny residents legitimate opportunities for social mobility and success. These conditions spawn subcultures in which crime, violence, and illegal drug use become normative (Sampson & Wilson, 1995). Several studies have tested macro-sociological theories that hypothesize about the effects of social structures on differential rates of violent victimization. For example, these investigations have indicated that violent victimization levels are higher in communities that are more heterogeneous in terms of race and age (Sampson, 1984); that are characterized by weaker friendship networks and lower rates of participation in formal and voluntary community organizations (Sampson & Groves, 1989); and that have lower levels of collective efficacy (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997), which is the ability of residents to share values as well as pool efforts and resources in order to solve problems that adversely affect the commonweal.

Social Network Theory. Social network theory is the study of how people establish relationships and interact with one another in reciprocal and non-reciprocal exchanges. Networks can also be described as the structure of inter-relationships, and people in the network are referred to as actors or nodes in the network (Freeman, 2004). For incidents in which victim and offender relationships are known, the vast majority of homicides (78%) involve nonstrangers (e.g., spouse, other family member, or acquaintance) (i.e., members of the same social network) (Cooper & Smith, 2011).

Victims of violent crime and violent offenders often live in the same social and physical environments and have similar backgrounds and proclivities. For example, more than 90% of homicide suspects and more than 70% of homicide victims in Chicago have criminal convictions (Rozas, 2009). Similarly, more than 80% of homicide victims in Baltimore have criminal records (Herman, 2009); those percentages are 77% and 75% in Milwaukee and Philadelphia, respectively (Johnson, 2007). In Chicago, people who simply knew a homicide victim were nine times more likely than those who did not to become a victim or perpetrator of homicide (Papachristos, Braga, & Hureau, 2012). As Papachristos (2009) states, “[homicide offenders] do not kill because they are poor, black, or young or live in a socially disadvantaged neighborhood. They kill because they live in a structured set of social relations in which violence works its way through a series of connected individuals” (p. 75).

Based on social network theory, police officials in Chicago launched a custom notification initiative in the city’s most violent neighborhoods. As part of the initiative, the department created a “heat list” consisting of potential victims and subjects with the greatest propensity to become involved in future violence. The list is based on an analysis of the identified person’s known associates, as well as the person’s history of violence as a perpetrator

and victim. Tailored to the background of each person, a custom notification letter is hand-delivered to the individuals' homes to inform them of the consequences (i.e., arrest, prosecution, and sentencing) of new or continued participation in violent acts. The letter also provides information about the availability of employment or other social services to help extricate the individual from a high-risk lifestyle. No known studies of the effects of this program have been conducted, but this initiative seems promising and could benefit from an empirical investigation of its impact.

Limitations of Victim precipitation and Lifestyle Theories. The basic assumptions of victim precipitation theories have been challenged. For example, victim precipitation presumes that victims' behaviors can fully explain the criminal act; that offenders only decide to engage in the act after the victim provokes the offender through signals and behaviors that are necessary and sufficient for the act to occur; and that the incident involves discernible victim intent as an element of precipitation (Franklin & Franklin, 1976). Routine activities theory is one of the best known, best studied, and most cited of the above victimization theories (Doerner & Lab, 2015). Yet studies of this theory as well as similar theories of victimization are challenged by definitional issues, such as the operationalization of a "potential offender," "vulnerable target," and "capable guardian." Also elusive in terms of measurement and interpretation is the concept of "lifestyle."

By the 1970s, so-called "antivictim" perspectives, which are predicated on victim blame and responsibility, had been roundly criticized in various quarters (Karmen, 1991). Many scholars and victim advocates have denounced the ideological basis of such concepts as victim provocation, precipitation, and facilitation. These notions were equated with a radical form of victim blaming that placed inordinate emphasis on victims' instead of offenders' culpability in

violent attacks (Karmen, 1991). Such explanations and their corresponding prevention programs and strategies were relatively ineffective in controlling crime and therefore served little purpose other than to criticize crime victims (Karmen, 1991).

Victim precipitation theories are also problematic for several other reasons (Eigenberg, 2014). The presumption of these perspectives is that victims know how to prevent their victimization and can always eschew risky behaviors and avoid risky places. Absolute avoidance ignores reality in a free and complex society in which victimization is pervasive, especially in poor neighborhoods where the risk of violent victimization is disproportionately high. Victimization is traumatic (see section on costs), and victim blame adds to the suffering of crime victims (see section on crime victim assistance) and draws attention away from the root causes of crime and violence (e.g., intergenerational poverty).

Perhaps the most vehement attacks on victim blame were leveled against Amir's (1971) research on rape, which strongly suggested that a certain percentage of such victims bore responsibility for their attacks. The backlash from feminists and victim service providers was especially fierce, leading to a heightened sensitivity toward victim blaming, which was regarded as tantamount to offender rationalization (criminal thinking and neutralization) as a cognitive strategy to dismiss victim suffering and loss (Fattah, 1979). From a methodological standpoint, Amir was criticized for relying solely on official police records and employing theoretical perspectives that lacked empirical support (Meier & Miethe, 1993). In addition, Amir was disparaged for proffering psychological explanations on the basis of aggregate-level data and for rendering extreme inferences from a limited dataset (Meier & Miethe, 1993).

In general, studies of victim precipitation have been rife with other methodological shortcomings, including the interchangeable operational uses of the terms 'facilitation,'

‘precipitation,’ and ‘provocation’ (Smith & Bouffard, 2014). True victim precipitation is difficult to examine due to the absence or incompleteness of data in police records regarding the victim’s role as the primary and direct aggressor in a crime. For example, homicide cases defy easy explanations of the victim’s role in the event. The victim is obviously unable to recount the attack. Homicides often occur in private settings and are often witnessed by only two people—the offender and the victim—only one of whom is able to illuminate the specific nature of the event and who is likely to be a highly self-serving reporter. Furthermore, studies of victim precipitation rarely incorporate statistical controls; therefore, results stemming from such studies are often inconclusive and provide no valid or elucidative sense of the effects of victim behaviors on the initiation or culmination of the crime (Smith & Bouffard, 2014).

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