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## EDITORIAL

# What ails Victimology?

**K. Jaishankar**

More than sixty years have passed, since Frederick Wertham, Benjamin Mendelsohn and Hans von Hentig introduced the concept of ‘Victimology’, nevertheless, till date victimology has not been recognized as a distinct academic discipline. In 1985, Cressey declared that, victimology is “*a non-academic programme under which a hodgepodge of ideas, interests, ideologies and research methods has been rather arbitrarily grouped*” (cited in Elias, 1994, p.9) and he also felt that victimology should be merged with criminology, if it does not possess proper orientation. Dutch criminologist Nagel (1959, 1963) also pointed the same view before Cressey (cited in Djik, 1999, p.1). Sarre (1994) and Sneider (2001) are also of the opinion that victimology is a part of criminology. Rock (1994) argues that victimology is a “*relatively amorphous discipline*” (Cited in Fattah 2000, p.24). There are also strong critics like Elias (1994) and Fattah (2000) who feels that victimology should be streamlined.

In spite of the criticisms by a few, victimology has grown and have come a long way from Cressey’s open statement. Several researchers (Elias, 1994; Fattah, 2000; Kirchhoff, 2008; Schneider, 2001; van Djik, 1999) have analyzed the development of victimology in the past decades and have agreed that victimology has grown. Kirchhoff (2008) explains the growth of victimology:

Victimology has matured, from a relatively new development in criminology to the social science of victims, victimizations and the reactions towards both – with reactions and interactions comprising the most important field: reactions of victims, informal reactions of the social environment leading to secondary victimization on one side, to the criminal justice reaction as one important reaction of the formal system of control on the other side (Kirchhoff, 2008, p.xi)

The creation of World Society of Victimology (WSV) (1979), 1985 UN declaration, the establishment of two international victimological institutes (Japan and Netherlands), the institution of victimological journals such as *International review of Victimology*, *Temida*, *International Perspectives in Victimology* and internet portals like *Victim Assistance Online* (Randy is doing a wonderful job), *International Victimology website* are certainly landmarks in the field of victimology. Also the WSV has conducted 12 international victimology symposia’s in the past three decades (The most recent one was conducted in Orlando, Florida, USA, 2006 and the next one is planned in Mito, Japan, 2009). Sneider (2001) proudly asserts that “*impressive summary volumes covering the most important presentations of these international victimological symposia’s have carried criminological victimization research into the world and constituted effective platforms for victimological discussion*” (Sneider, 2001, p.449).

Argentina, Australia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, El Salvador, Finland, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Nepal, New Zealand, Portugal, Serbia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, and USA have victimology associations (WSV, 2008). The works of some societies like Victimology Society of Serbia and Japan Society of Victimology are highly laudable. Researchers in Tokiwa International Victimology Institute, Japan and INTERVICT, The Netherlands, are involved in exemplary victimology research and some of them have even focused on contemporary issues like Identity-related crime victimization (van der Meulen, 2009).

What ails Victimology? In spite of the prolific achievements of WSV and other international victimologists, why does victimology struggle to get the distinct status of an academic discipline? To answer these questions, there is a need to assess some of the symptomatic failings which has hampered the growth of victimology.

### **1. Lack of strong theoretical orientation**

As a major part of criminology still stands on sociological theories, victimology also stands on those theories. The failure of victimologists in creating strong victimological theories has stalled the emergence of victimology as an independent academic discipline. It is not correct to claim theories, such as, routine activities theory and rational choice theory as victimological theories, as the proponents never had any idea to see their theories from a victimological perspective, though they have utilized victimological concepts to develop their theories.

Bajpai (2004) asserts that the concepts in situational crime prevention (SCP) and opportunity reduction are derived from knowledge base of victimology. However, he cautions that:

The acknowledgment to victimological thrust has seldom been made in the works conducted on SCP. The issues like risk, vulnerability, victim recidivism or repeat victimization, victim's role in crime, victim precipitation and victim types are some of the major concepts in Victimology that have applied and utilized quite widely in SCP practices .... The victimological studies and concept did not find adequate mention in whatever theories developed in the area of SCP and crime reduction. It is therefore a bit misleading to conclude that the RAT or rational choice theories alone are fully attributable to the development of notion of SCP (Bajpai, 2004, p. 76, 79).

Victimological concepts have been utilized for developing criminological theories, but, victimological theories have never been developed and only conceptual models have been developed. Fattah (2000) tried to provide a victimization model from criminological theories. But the model has not been cited nor accepted by many. Sneider (2001) has also brought out social structural, cultural, institutional victimization theory. However, it looks more a typology of victimization than a theory and has the same fate of Fattah's model. Also, the general, penal, positivist, radical and critical victimologies are only perspectives and not theories.

In this context, Ronel (2009) argues:

From the standpoint of an individual, there are some models of victimology that you may call a victimological theory, e.g., a theory of becoming a victim (Ronel's Criminal Spin theory, 2009), but they are pointing to a small portion of victimology. There are partial models and theories in victimology, but the field is still waiting for a comprehensive theory parallel, for example, to the general theory of deviance, strain, differential association etc (quoted from a personal email communication, 2009).

Hence, it is time to evolve new victimological theories and this will help to make victimology to stand out as an independent discipline.

## **2. More focus on victim rights and assistance**

Victimology at the present is more application oriented and it deals more with the rights and assistance of victims. Elias (1994) and Fattah (2000) have felt that victimology has lost its scientific rigour. While the former felt that humanistic influences as the reason, the latter felt the social and political activism as the reason for abandoning scientific rigor (Gaudreault & Waller, 2001). Ballin (1994) cited Elias paper presented in the 8<sup>th</sup> International Victimology Symposium:

Elias, challenged victimologists to consider the need for returning to the application of scientific rigour. He challenged the more humanistic influences as having taken the issues too far without adequate enquiry and suggested that many hypotheses could not be sustained (Ballin, Para 3).

Though more than a decade have passed after the challenge of Elias, still, very few studies/research are done in the areas of causation of victimization, victim-offender relationship and victimogenesis etc. Most of the contemporary research studies look in to the compensation issues of victimization and only focus on psychological and legal issues. Academic institutions should concentrate more on the theoretical issues of victimization, rather than victim rights and assistance issues which can be well managed by NGO's and Governments.

## **3. Lack of adequate teaching content and Cutting the umbilical chord from Mother Criminology**

Victimology is rich in research content and poor in teaching content. It should be noted, that the post graduate certificate courses conducted at Japan, Croatia and South Africa, suggest teaching content for only 8 days (of these 12 day courses). Hence, due to lack of adequate teaching content, a full fledged Master's program in Victimology is highly unfeasible (though some have over ambitiously tried to start/started such master's programs). The certificate courses of WSV and courses within criminology programmes are right options, but a full fledged Master's program is not a wise option. Probably in the near future teaching content in victimology may improve and then a master's degree could be started in major universities.

Victimology has to stand on the pillars of Criminology, Criminal Justice, Sociology, Psychology, Political Science, Law and Social work. As Victimology suffers from lack of adequate teaching content, it is not the right time to cut the umbilical chord of Mother Criminology. However, there can be many research institutes in Victimology, that can be distinct from the Criminology departments and these research institutes can evolve as centers for excellence in victimological research.

## **4. Lack of acceptance from the International community and need for nurturing victimology in universities**

Victimology is like the game of Cricket, which is accepted only by few European and commonwealth countries. Victimology societies started in few countries have not got the national recognition. Though these societies claim to be national, they do not have a national character. They are positioned only in one or two universities and they do not represent those nations in *toto*. The American Society of Victimology (ASV) was founded only in 2003 and it has not reached the entire nation. Though the American countries have concentrated on Victim rights and assistance issues by their office of victims of crime, academic discussions/debates on victimology is less in American academic institutions. It is

time that victimology grows more in the universities, rather than in government offices. It is understandable that “governments need to pay compensation, so the necessity to investigate crime and identify victims, therefore victimology originates in the government departments of criminal justice administration” (Raj, 2009, by personal email communication, 2009). However, core victimological research and the responsibility to develop victimology as an independent academic discipline lies in the hands of academics and not government officials.

### **5. The need to expand the scope of victimology**

Current victimology is seen only from an atomistic perspective and not from a mass perspective (genocide victimization, state sponsored terrorism, riot victimization) and interdisciplinary researches in political science and sociology is lacking (Raj, by personal email communication, 2009). The issue of boundaries of victimology is well debated (Groenhuisen, 2006; Dijk, Groenhuisen & Winkel, 2007) and even some have felt the need for inclusion of victimization of animals and environment (Simon, 2007). There are some researchers like Turvey and Petherick (2008) who view victimology from forensic perspectives and argue for the need of a new discipline, forensic victimology. Turvey and Petherick (2008) feel that current victimology is taught:

almost exclusively through a narrow lens that involves feminist and restorative perspectives bundled with less than reliable victim crime data... Forensic victimology moves victimology from the theoretical study of victim groups through the lens of radical agendas to an applied scientific discipline that helps solve crime and resolve legal questions.... It provides scientific balance against the idealization or demonization of victims, a filter for deception and false reporting, and the means for identifying a threshold of relevance for victim information and opinions already at work in the criminal justice system (Turvey & Petherick, 2008, para 3,9,11).

Forensic victimology is a new development and it will provide a scientific scope to the conventional victimology. In this context, the substantive model of the study of victimology proposed by Kirchhoff (2008) would be a right option for enhancing the scope of victimology; however that model should also include criminology and forensic sciences. Expanding the scope of victimology will also provide adequate teaching content and will further assist in developing a Master’s program in victimology.

### **Conclusion**

Dussich (2003), in the Symposium of American Society of victimology, has provided a vision for victimology. He writes:

In the not so distant future I see: a nation that provides needs-based services to all victims regardless as to the origin of the victimization, services that are provided by highly trained personnel who have licenses based on national standards; professional victimology education that leads to a career in either teaching, research or direct services; a victimology that has the victim in the center of its concerns; standardized victimology curricula offered in all major universities; a victimology that accepts a comprehensive theory which explains all forms of victimization and the process of recovery; a balance of academic offerings equal to criminology; a victimology that is restorative for all persons involved; and finally, a victimology and victim services that is accountable for its teachings and its services through the medium of empirical evaluation (Dussich, 2003, p.16).

Dussich (2003) is also "convinced that these possibilities are on our horizon and will be the great challenges of the next generation of victimologists" (Dussich, 2003, p.16). Though some of these challenges might be very difficult to achieve in the present scenario, we can hope to achieve the vision provided by Dussich (2003), in the near future.

This editorial might open academic debate and I feel that it will also open new grounds to the growth of Victimology, a subject closer to my heart. I welcome a debate with my fellow victimologists.

### **About the current issue of IJCJS**

The current issue contains five articles and a book review. The first paper by *Webb* seeks to throw light on the issue of media coverage of proceedings on juvenile delinquents. The author has tried to expose both sides of the coin by presenting both the pros and cons of publicizing through media. The paper concludes by resting the case in the hands of the judiciary by allowing conditional access to media coverage. The author says that presiding judge should grant access only in cases where it is absolutely clear either that no harm will result to the juvenile from the media's presence and subsequent coverage of the proceedings, or that publicity is necessary to prevent a greater harm to the general public.

*The next article by Filipkowski* discusses the ill effects of the online payment systems. It particularly focuses on how money laundering can be committed over the web. The article defines the various ways in which online payments are made. He furthers his argument by spelling out the loop holes within the existing mechanisms through which money laundering can be committed via the internet.

*Barton and Roy in the third article of this issue* seek to highlight the impact of Electronic Home Monitoring systems on criminals convicted of drunken driving. The article seeks to expand the current literature by assessing the relationship between convicted drunk drivers sentenced to Electronic Monitoring Home Detention program and their exit status. The study examines that whether any significant relationship exists between the following characteristics of convicted drunk drivers placed in EMHD and their exit status: age group; race; sex; marital status; education level; offense class; charge reduction; sentence type; sentence length; prior OWI offense; prior jail commitment; prior imprisonment; prior community corrections placement; and prior alcohol or drug counseling. The research undertaken by the authors leaves the conclusion at exploring other viable forays to gauge the efficacy of these neo jail replacement systems.

*Brownfield and Thompson* article, examines various theories of criminology which focus on the identity of an individual as the root cause viz. symbolic interactionist theory, labelling theory, and control theory. The analysis is based on data collected from 2001 study of high school students in a large metropolitan community in Canada. Taking various parameters like social interaction, race, gender response into account, this paper concentrates on self control and self impact levels of the delinquents.

The final article of *Gunter* addresses the issue of internet piracy among college students. This study investigates the empirical validity of differential association and deterrence as applied to multiple forms of digital piracy. Data used in this research were collected through student surveys from two mid-Atlantic higher-education institutions, one of which is a small, private, liberal-arts College and the other a moderately sized, public university. The paper concentrates on the fact that social interaction theories can help in radically bringing down the levels of piracy. The author concludes that college students with peers engaging in piracy and parents supportive of piracy are more likely to engage in piracy themselves. The issue concludes with a book review of Ali-Alfeel.

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