

## 1.14: Victims and Victim Typologies

It was not until 1660 that the word victim was first used to in the sense of a person who is hurt, tortured or killed by another. A victim of crime did not exist until well into the 17th century. Why were victims ignored for so long? <sup>[1]</sup> A victim is an integral part of the system, in fact, some say without a victim there would be no need for the CJ system. Victims are the people or communities that suffer physical, emotional, or financial harm as a result of a crime. Over the years different typologies of victims have been created to demonstrate the unique role or position of victims in relation to crime. Typically, when people hear someone has been a victim of a crime we often think of them as completely innocent. In fact, a lot of new legislation and policy changes created to provide the victim with a greater role in the CJ offers the stereotypical view of the victim as completely innocent. <sup>[2]</sup>

### Typologies of Crime Victims

Theorists have developed victim typologies that are concerned primarily with the situational and personal characteristics of victims and the relationship between victims and offenders. Benjamin Mendelsohn was one of the first criminologists to create a victim typology, in the 1950s, but was not without controversy. Below is a table of Mendelsohn's typology of crime victims and as you can see he placed a lot of emphasis on most victims attitude that leads to their victimization. <sup>[3]</sup>

#### Mendelsohn's Typology of Crime Victims

Innocent victim	Someone who did not contribute to the victimization and is in the wrong place at the wrong time. This is the victim we most often envision when thinking about enhancing victim rights.
The victim with minor guilt	Does not actively participate in their victimization but contributes to it in some minor degree, such as frequenting high-crime areas. This would be a person that continues to go to a bar that is known for nightly assault.
The guilty victim, guilty offender	Victim, an offender may have engaged in criminal activity together. This would be two people attempting to steal a car, rob a store, sell drugs, etc.
The guilty offender, guiltier victim	The victim may have been the primary attacker, but the offender won the fight.
Guilty victim	The victim instigated a conflict but is killed in self-defense. An example would be an abused woman killing her partner while he is abusing her.
Imaginary victim	Some people pretend to be victims and are not. This would be someone falsifying reports.

Other criminologists developed similar typologies but included other elements. For example, Hans Von Hentig expanded his typology from situational factors that Mendelsohn looked at and considered the role of biological, sociological and psychological factors. For example, Von Hentig said the young, elderly, and women are more susceptible to victimization because of things such as physical vulnerabilities. It is important to recognize that some crimes, and ultimately crime victims, are excluded in these typologies such as white-collar and corporate crime. <sup>[4][5]</sup>

#### Von Hentig's Typology

Young people	Immature, under adult supervision, lack physical strength and lack the mental and emotional maturity to recognize victimization
Females/elderly	Lack of physical strength
Mentally ill/intellectually disabled	Can be taken advantage of easily
Immigrants	Cannot understand language or threat of deportation makes them vulnerable

Minorities	Marginalized in society, so vulnerable to victimization.
Dull normals	Reasonably intelligent people who are naive or vulnerable in some way. These people are easily deceived.
The depressed The acquisitive	Gullable, easily swayed, and not vigilant. Greedy and can be targeted for scammers who would take advantage of their desire for financial gain.
The lonesome and broken-hearted	Often prone to victimization by intimate partners. They desire to be with someone at any cost. They are susceptible to manipulation.
Tormentors	Primary abusers in relationships and become victims when the one being abused turns on them.
Blocked, exempted, and fighting victims	Enter situations in which they are taken advantage such as blackmail.

Von Hentig's work was the basis for later theories of **victim precipitation**. Victim precipitation suggests many victims play a role in their victimization. First, the victim acted first during the course of the offense, and second that the victim instigated the commission of the offense. <sup>[6]</sup> It is important to note that criminologists were attempting to demonstrate that victims may have some role in the victimization and are not truly innocent. Today we often recognize the role in victimization without blaming the individual because ultimately the person who offended is the person who offended.

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2. Fuller, J.R. (2019). *Introduction to Criminal Justice*: New York: Oxford University Press. ↩
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4. Burgess, A. W. (2013). *Victimology: Theories and applications*. (3rd ed.). Burlington: Jones and Bartlett. ↩
5. Von Hentig, H. (1948). *The criminal and his victim: Studies in the sociobiology of crime*. New Haven: Yale University Press. ↩
6. Smith, M., & Bouffard, L. A. (2014). "Victim precipitation." *The Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, Wiley Online Library. ↩

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