

Sociology 4099: Victimology

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Overheads Class 2.4: Victimization Surveys: Problems & Alternatives

* Advantages of victimization surveys compare to UCR statistics:

- Respondents asked about theoretically relevant issues
- Weed out public decisions not to report
- Weed out police decisions not to record
- Improve estimates of crime and victimization

* Problems:

- Victims have to know they have been victimized
- Standardized survey questions can be interpreted differently
- Dishonesty in responses
- Faulty memories of respondents
- Giving most socially desirable answers
- Limiting offences inquired about affects outcome
- Selection of respondents
- Large samples needed/ inflates cost

* Again, we must see these as useful constructions, to be used with other sources

One Alternative: An Interactionist Approach:

* Holstein and Miller (1990)

- Don't presuppose that people are victims
- Focus on interpretive, interactional processes by which victim status and identity arises
- Victim assignment a way of constructing reality through

retorical dramatization of injury and innocence

* Practical consequences of accepting victim status:

- Absolving “victim” of responsibility for injury
- Assigns cause for trouble
- Specifies responses and remedies
- Accounts for victim’s subsequent failures

* Victim Contests:

- Portrayals/claims of victimization subject to dispute
- Illustrate political character of description
- Depend on credibility, influence, etc.

* The upshot:

- Potential for exciting research
- Opens up questions not adequately addressed by official statistics and victimization surveys
- Requires qualitative research