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Victimization Trends and Correlates: Macro- and Microinfluences and New Directions for Research

Janet L. Lauritsen¹ and Maribeth L. Rezey²

¹Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Missouri-St. Louis, St. Louis, Missouri 63121, USA; email: janet_lauritsen@umsl.edu

²Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology, Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, Illinois 60660, USA

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Abstract

This paper assesses the state of the literature on victimization and its correlates by examining a diverse set of victimization trends and by summarizing the known correlates of victimization exhibited in research conducted at varying levels of analysis. A broad assessment of victimization research is valuable because it can shed light on both the similarities and differences in a wide range of trends and correlates of criminal victimization, thus prompting useful integration of the diverse set of literatures in this field. We also highlight how some individual-level correlates of victimization vary across spatial contexts as well as in their magnitude over time. Our review suggests that further attention to the commonalities in correlates across various types of victimization, and to multilevel and macrohistorical contexts, can help improve the utility of victimization research findings for both theory and practice.



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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we summarize the findings and assess the state of the research literature on victimization trends and correlates. To our knowledge, a broad and recent appraisal of the key findings derived from macro- and microlevel studies of victimization does not exist. We seek to fill this important gap in the literature by beginning with an assessment of the similarities in the trends among a diverse set of victimization types. Contemporary studies of victimization tend to be specialized, particularly according to type of crime (e.g., violence versus property crimes) and victim characteristics (e.g., violence against women, child victimization, and violence against other vulnerable groups). In addition, victimization research appears in a broad range of journals outside the field of criminology, such as public health and medicine, psychology, and social work, and it is not often the case that the trends in various types of victimization are compared in ways that may prompt broader interdisciplinary insights into the factors underlying these trends. To further this goal, we provide an overview of victimization trends for traditionally specified forms of crime and present new comparisons for different forms of violence that are not often considered together, such as intimate partner violence and child abuse—two of the largest subareas of victimization research.

We also provide a summary of the known correlates of victimization found in studies conducted at varying levels of analysis. For a multitude of reasons, most studies of victimization have focused on assessing how individual-level characteristics and experiences are associated with one's risk for various types of crime. However, there are also large literatures examining how the features of households and families, neighborhoods and other types of communities, and broader sociohistorical contexts are correlated with victimization rates; there is a smaller but important body of multilevel research that assesses individual risk within specific social contexts. Because of space constraints in this review, it is not possible to include a full discussion of each correlate for all types of victimization that have been studied at every level of analysis. Therefore, we focus on the key correlates emphasized in the literature, organized by level of analysis, and note some of the most prominent findings in these areas. What this paper does not provide is a comparative assessment of the amount of support for different theoretical perspectives on victimization. However, where appropriate, we draw on prominent victimization perspectives to help organize our discussion of the trends and correlates presented here.

This paper is organized into four sections. In the first section, we provide a brief overview of the types of data typically used in studies of victimization trends and correlates. The second section of the paper provides victimization trends over the past 40 years for the major categories of violent and property crime as measured in homicide data and in the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). This section also includes a set of more recent trends in lethal and nonlethal violence against intimate partners and children. Correlation coefficients are used to show the degree of correspondence in the levels and year-to-year changes in these forms of victimization that are rarely compared. In the third section of the paper, we present and discuss the correlates of victimization found in prior studies conducted across various units of analyses, including individuals, families, schools, communities, and other macrospatial entities as well as macrotemporal periods. The fourth section of the paper discusses some of the issues and challenges that must be tackled to provide new and useful insights into victimization.

VICTIMIZATION DATA

The origins of large-scale victimization research can be traced to the developments associated with the 1967 report of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. The Commission's report argued that there was a great need for information about crime

and victimization from victims as a complement and alternative to law enforcement administrative records, which exclude crimes not reported to the police and those not recorded in police data. The recommendations from the Commission's report led to the development of the National Crime Survey in the United States [later known as the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)]. From 1973 to the present, the NCVS has been the primary source of information about victimization in the United States, gathering a range of self-report data about individual and household experiences with violent and property crime (Planty et al. 2014). The NCVS uses a large, nationally representative sampling frame, and conducts interviews with persons aged 12 and older in each sampled household. Victimization experiences are measured using a series of cues and common language questions, with the overarching goal of producing estimates of the levels, trends, and demographic correlates of criminal victimization. The NCVS is particularly useful for estimating trends in various types of violent and property victimization because (with the exception of a redesign in 1992) its methodology has remained consistent over time (Groves & Cork 2008).

The NCVS, however, does not provide trend information about all forms of victimization. As a self-report survey, it necessarily excludes homicide, and it also excludes measures of child victimization, including abuse and neglect when the child is younger than age 12. Because it uses a household-based sample design, the NCVS data also exclude the victimization experiences of persons not living in households, such as the homeless and those living in institutional settings such as jails and prisons. Although the NCVS trend data are valid for many research purposes, there are concerns that the estimated levels of some forms of victimization are too low—particularly for some forms of violence against women, such as intimate partner violence and rape and sexual assault (Kruttschnitt et al. 2004, 2014). These concerns are important and raise cautions about using the victimization estimates to make risk comparisons across crime types.

Trend comparisons are less affected by these concerns because even if the estimates are too low, they are likely to be consistently so over time, thus not biasing the crime-specific trends. However, if response rates are changing substantially over time and differentially across subgroups of persons, it is possible that the correlates of victimization may be biased in changing ways over time. The NCVS person-level response rates have declined some over time, from 96% in 1973 to approximately 87% during the 2011–2013 period (Bur. Justice Stat. 2014). Response rates during this period also were approximately three percentage points higher among females than males, whereas the differences in the response rates were less than this amount between whites, blacks, and Latinos. Age is most strongly associated with response rates, with rates notably increasing (by roughly 10 percentage points) after age 25, suggesting that some caution be used when estimating the age–victimization relationship (Bur. Justice Stat. 2014). Our analysis of NCVS sampling weights by sex, race, and ethnicity (not shown) finds that the response rates have declined similarly across these subgroups and are very highly correlated (range = 0.94 to 0.99) over time; thus, concerns that these subgroup trends have become increasingly biased over time are minimal.

For purposes of investigating the correlates of victimization, the NCVS data are limited in large part to the sociodemographic characteristics of victims, such as sex, race and ethnicity, and age, and to household characteristics, such as residential location, family composition, and income. Although these individual and household factors are important correlates, they do not reveal the mechanisms by which victimization risk increases or decreases. For insights into the theoretical mechanisms, researchers must turn to other sources of self-report data, such as those that measure persons' activities and exposure to potential offenders. Such data have been gathered in studies of adolescent delinquency and offending as well as in some studies of adults and college students. Contextual data on victimization are also available in social surveys such as the Seattle Telephone Survey (Miethe & McDowall 1993, Rountree et al. 1994), the Program on Human

Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN) (Sampson et al. 1997), and the British Crime Survey (Sampson & Wooldredge 1987). For purposes of investigating individual and contextual correlates of victimization, there are much richer data in these types of self-report studies than in the NCVS, and we draw on a wide range of studies from these data sources in our discussion of these correlates.

Macrolevel correlates of victimization can be found in multiple data sources, and those used here include survey self-report data from the NCVS and administrative agency data on homicide and substantiated child abuse. Homicide rates are based on fatal victimization records from either death certificates or police reports. Homicide rates are particularly useful for victimization research because they can be studied at various levels of analysis (such as neighborhoods and metropolitan areas, and in national trends). Publicly available NCVS data lack this capacity, although they have been used in research assessing the metropolitan-area correlates by using specially prepared subsets of the data as well as in research assessing temporal correlates using the aggregated national-level data. In addition, the area-identified NCVS data have been used in a handful of multilevel studies in which census-tract data have been appended to the individual-level NCVS data so that the impact of local area characteristics on victimization risk can be assessed. National-level data on child abuse are from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). NCANDS data include reports of child maltreatment that come to the attention of state child protective service agencies; however, they are not available before 1990. Although administrative records have been found to be valid and reliable indicators of national trends in homicide (Smith & Cooper 2013), there is some debate about whether administrative records on child abuse produce reliable trends (see, e.g., Wood et al. 2012). We draw from studies using these (and other) data sources on victimization to summarize the known macrolevel correlates of risk and focus on patterns found in the United States.

VICTIMIZATION TRENDS

Figure 1 displays the trends for the period 1973 to 2013 in serious violent victimization derived from the NCVS for the crimes of rape, robbery, and aggravated assault, and for homicide using the Supplementary Homicide Reports.¹ It is clear from this figure that these forms of serious violence were at their highest levels in the 1970s and 1980s, and each has declined notably over time. It is also apparent that the trends are similar across crime types, even though fatal and nonfatal violence rates are derived from different data sources. The magnitudes of the declines in violence from 1973 to 2013 have been substantial—ranging from a 52% decrease in homicide to a 77% decrease in aggravated assault.

To describe the similarities in the trends statistically, **Table 1** presents the correlations in levels and first-differences and also includes two additional forms of victimization from the NCVS—burglary and motor vehicle theft. All these level correlations are high (ranging from $r = 0.79$ to $r = 0.99$), suggesting that each of these victimization types shares a common underlying trend over this period. The correlations in first-differences are also noteworthy, as they suggest that there are significant similar fluctuations in year-to-year changes in many of the rates.² Thus, both the long- and short-term changes in violent and property victimization vary in similar ways.

To illustrate how the trends in violent victimization are associated with different forms of domestic violence, **Figure 2** displays the 1990 to 2013 trends in homicide and serious nonlethal

¹NCVS rates are per 1,000 persons ages 12 and older, whereas homicide rates ($\times 100$) are per 1,000 persons of all ages.

²Correlations greater than 0.31 are statistically significant at $p \leq 0.05$ (two-tail test) when $N = 41$.

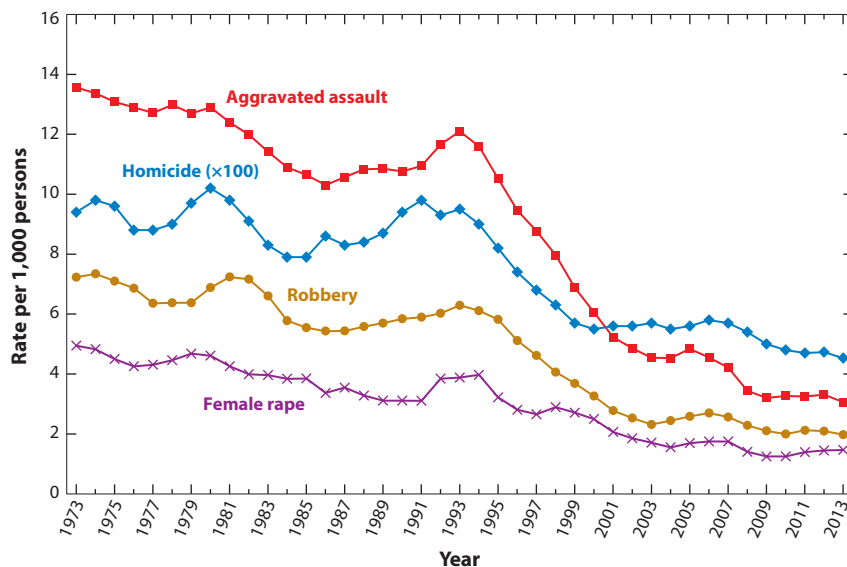


Figure 1

Violent victimization rates, 1973–2013.

violence (shown also in **Figure 1**) alongside trends in lethal and nonlethal intimate partner violence, child homicide and abuse, and rates of children exposed to violence in the home (which is an indicator created from the NCVS capturing the rate of children age 17 or younger living in households where at least one household member age 12 or older experienced one or more nonfatal violent victimizations in the past year in their home). Each of these trends is found to have declined notably since the early 1990s, indicating that the victimization of women and children shares a common underlying long-term trend with violence more broadly defined. As was the case with the general categories of violence, the magnitudes of the declines in child and intimate

Table 1 Correlations between victimization trends in the United States, 1973–2013^a

	Homicide	Serious nonlethal violence ^b	Rape	Robbery	Aggravated assault	Simple assault	Burglary	Motor vehicle theft
Homicide	1.00	0.96	0.89	0.96	0.96	0.93	0.88	0.96
Serious nonlethal violence ^b	0.41	1.00	0.95	0.99	0.99	0.96	0.92	0.93
Rape	0.25	0.53	1.00	0.91	0.94	0.88	0.90	0.84
Robbery	0.38	0.72	0.01	1.00	0.98	0.95	0.91	0.92
Aggravated assault	0.31	0.93	0.42	0.53	1.00	0.96	0.91	0.94
Simple assault	0.23	0.55	0.25	0.46	0.50	1.00	0.82	0.93
Burglary	0.44	0.48	0.23	0.36	0.45	0.26	1.00	0.79
Motor vehicle theft	0.60	0.39	0.35	0.27	0.32	0.36	0.29	1.00

^aCorrelations in trend levels appear above the shaded diagonal; correlations in first-differences appear below the shaded diagonal.

^bSerious nonlethal violence includes rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

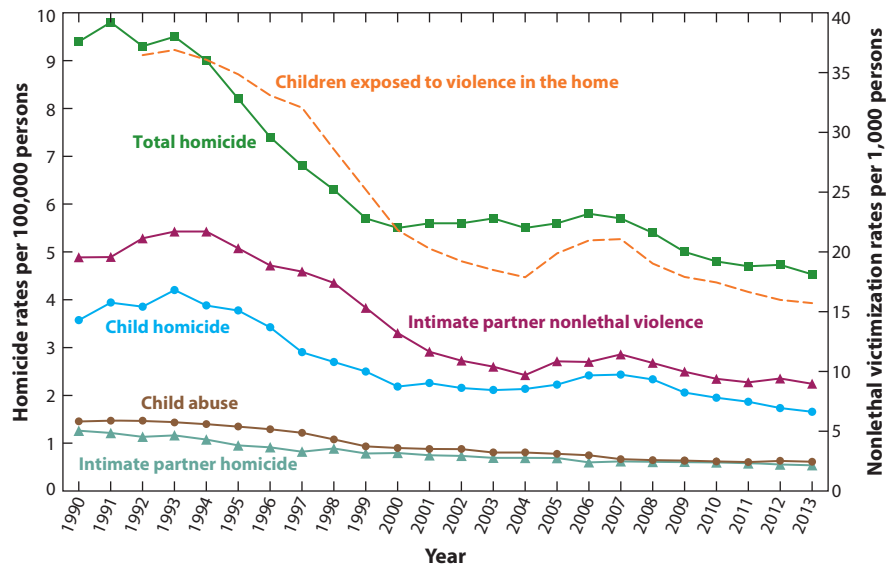


Figure 2

Violent victimization rates, 1990–2013.

partner violence were also large and similar in magnitude from 1992 to 2013, ranging from a 52% decrease in intimate partner homicide to a 58% decrease in child abuse.

The statistical description of these trends displayed in **Table 2** reveals that these long-term trends are also highly correlated, ranging from $r = 0.88$ to $r = 0.98$. The first-difference correlations for these types of victimization are not as uniform as those shown in the previous table, although each type of violence is consistently associated with the overall homicide trends, indicating that year-to-year changes in children’s exposure to violence in the home, child abuse and homicide, and lethal and nonlethal intimate partner violence tend to be accompanied by similar year-to-year changes in homicide. Additionally, annual fluctuations in nonlethal intimate partner violence (as well as the long-term trends) are found to be significantly correlated ($p \leq 0.10$, two-tail test) with indicators of children’s victimization that are derived from three different data sources—child homicide, child abuse, and children’s exposure to violence in the home. The high degree of correspondence in these family and broader violence trends suggests that there is likely to be a shared set of social forces underlying victimization risk trends for different forms of violence.

Importantly, many prior studies of violence trends reveal the value of disaggregating trends by the demographic characteristics of the victim, such as age, sex, and race and ethnicity. For example, researchers noted the disparate increases in homicide during the late 1980s and early 1990s among young black males (e.g., Blumstein & Rosenfeld 1998), whereas others have shown that long-term declines in nonlethal violence have disproportionately benefitted males compared to females (Heimer & Lauritsen 2008) and that short-term fluctuations in the violent victimization of black, white, and Latino males vary as well (Lauritsen & Heimer 2010). These types of findings indicate that some sociodemographic characteristics, and perhaps other individual-level correlates of victimization, may change over time.

To examine this issue with more recent data, the race-ethnicity ratios and the sex ratios for serious nonlethal violence from 1973 to 2013 are displayed in **Figure 3**. The same set of ratios is not shown for lethal violence because homicide data do not permit a comparison of Latinos to

Table 2 Correlations between violent victimization trends in the United States, 1990–2013^a

	Homicide	Serious nonlethal violence ^b	Intimate partner homicide	Intimate partner nonlethal violence	Child homicide	Child abuse	Children exposed to violence in their home ^c
Homicide	1.00	0.95	0.97	0.90	0.98	0.96	0.93
Serious nonlethal violence ^b	0.51	1.00	0.94	0.97	0.97	0.97	0.97
Intimate partner homicide	0.35	0.04	1.00	0.88	0.93	0.97	0.91
Intimate partner nonlethal violence	0.32	0.70	– .05	1.00	0.94	0.94	0.97
Child homicide	0.78	0.55	0.16	0.46	1.00	0.95	0.95
Child abuse	0.46	0.37	0.03	0.37	0.32	1.00	0.95
Children exposed to violence in their home ^c	0.44	0.76	0.04	0.67	0.31	0.39	1.00

^aCorrelations in trend levels appear above the shaded diagonal; correlations in first-differences appear below the shaded diagonal.

^bSerious nonlethal violence includes rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

^cCorrelations from 1992–2013.

blacks and whites over this period. However, we do note that the available sex, race, and ethnicity ratios tend to be larger for homicide than those shown here for serious nonlethal victimization. Two key findings emerge from the trends in these ratios. First, the sex ratio in nonlethal violence continues to approach parity (from 0.53 in 1973 to 0.87 in 2013), indicating that the relationship between sex and serious violent victimization has diminished considerably over time. This is due to the fact that male rates of victimization declined faster than female rates during this time period (not shown in **Figure 3**). Second, the race-ethnicity ratios exhibit no consistent trend

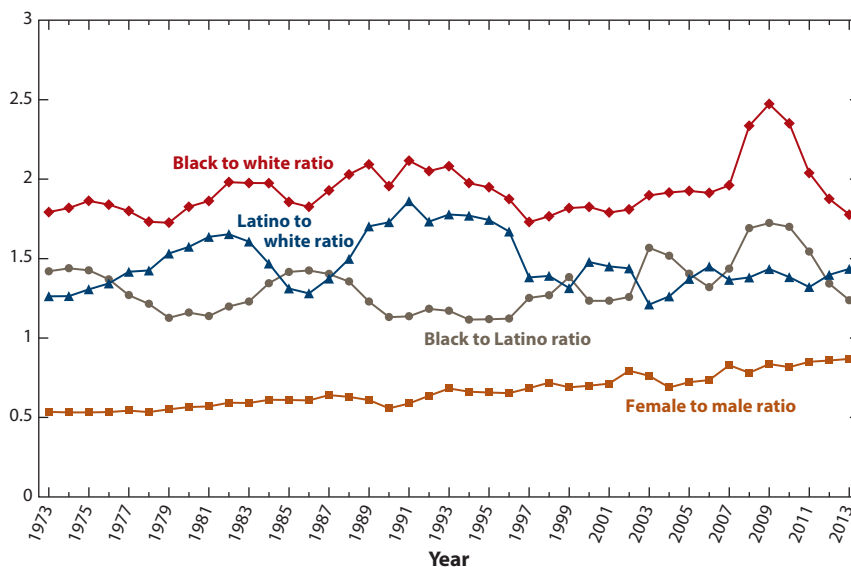


Figure 3

Race-ethnicity and sex ratios in nonlethal violent victimization, 1973–2013.

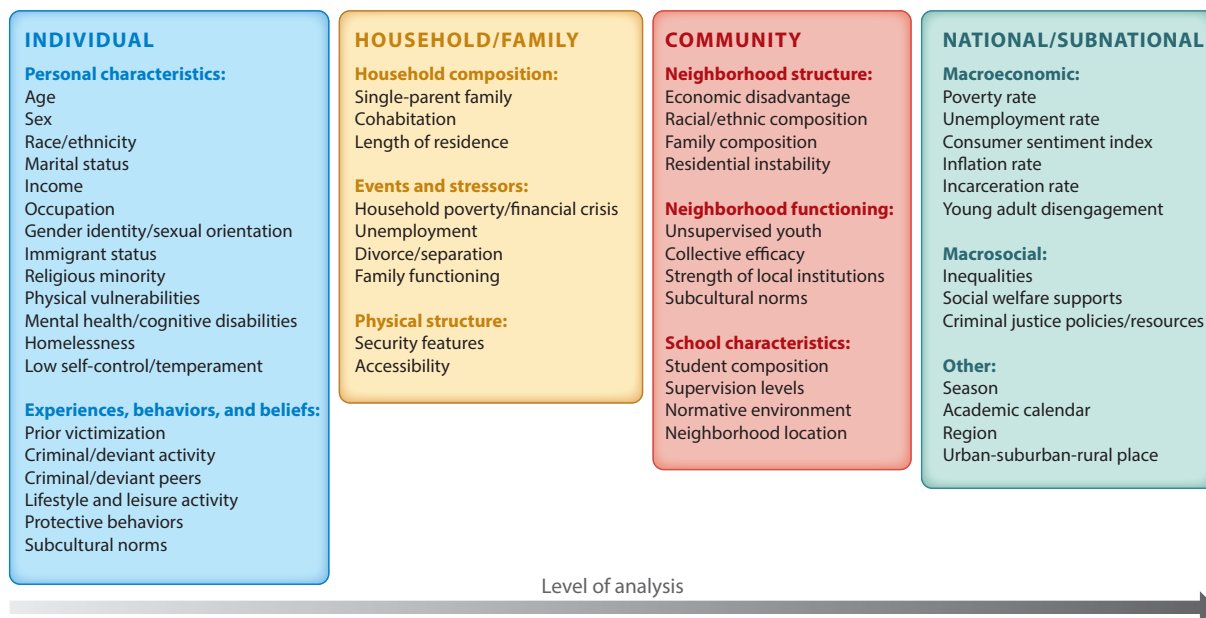


Figure 4

Correlates of victimization by level of analysis.

toward parity because the changes in the group-specific rates are roughly similar over the long-term. Short-term periodic fluctuations in the ratios appear, but the race-ethnicity ratios in 2013 are remarkably similar to those from 1973. Thus, race and ethnic disparities in serious violent victimization remain persistent.

VICTIMIZATION CORRELATES

Summarizing the correlates of victimization can be a daunting task because the relevant research includes not only many studies based on survey data but also the vast macrolevel literature on homicide rates. Because macrolevel findings about homicide (and other forms of crime derived from the Uniform Crime Reports) have been summarized and assessed elsewhere (e.g., in meta-analyses by Pratt & Cullen 2005 and in a review of crime trends research by Baumer 2008), we focus our summary on the correlates of nonlethal violent victimization and, to a lesser extent, property crime victimization largely derived from victimization survey data. **Figure 4** provides a list of the correlates of victimization organized by level of analysis based on our review of the literature.³

Individual-Level Correlates

The individual-level correlates of victimization can be loosely categorized as characteristics of the person, the behaviors they routinely engage in, the types of events they experience, the situations

³We acknowledge that this list is not fully exhaustive in its detail. Because of space limitations, it was necessary to combine numerous measures into general categories, emphasizing and citing those that have received the most attention in the literature. We note select studies for most of the correlates described. For additional information, we also include seminal studies in the field of victimology in the Related Resources section.

they encounter, and their attitudes toward potentially victimizing situations. For many of these correlates, it is unknown whether they would remain statistically significant once other individual-level or macrolevel characteristics are considered. The key sociodemographic correlates of violent victimization found in nationally representative surveys are age, sex, race and ethnicity, and marital and cohabitation status (Tjaden et al. 1999, Truman & Morgan 2016). Younger persons, males, racial and ethnic minorities, and unmarried, cohabitating, and recently separated or divorced persons tend to be at higher risk than females, whites, and married persons for many forms of violent victimization (see, e.g., Brown & Bulanda 2008, Heimer & Lauritsen 2008). There are important exceptions to these patterns—for instance, rape, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence are much higher among females than males (Catalano 2013). However, it is also important to note (as described earlier) that some correlates such as sex appear to be declining in magnitude over time, as evidenced by the change in the victimization sex ratio. Other correlates of victimization, such as race, ethnicity, and marital separation (Rezey 2017) have remained relatively persistent over time, suggesting that the risk factors that account for the relationships between victimization and these characteristics have remained more durable over time.

Characteristics such as income and occupation have also been found to be correlated with victimization in representative samples such as the NCVS. Poorer persons experience more violence (Harrell et al. 2014, Truman & Morgan 2016), as do those who work in occupations involving more contact with troubled persons, such as police/security personnel and medical staff (Lauritsen et al. 2012). Persons with physical limitations also have somewhat higher rates of both violent and property victimization (Harrell & Rand 2010).

There are other person-level characteristics believed to be associated with increased risk of violence; however, most of the studies suggesting their relevance are not national in scope because of limited data availability. We include these in our list of correlates because there is good reason to suspect that these socially stigmatized groups experience higher rates of victimization. For example, there is some evidence that homeless persons are at greater risk for victimization (Hoyt et al. 1999). Also, there is evidence to suggest that gender identity and sexual orientation (Katz-Wise & Hyde 2012, Perry 2001, Wilson 2014), having a mental health disorder or learning disability (Fekkes et al. 2006, Silver 2002, Turner et al. 2011), being a member of an immigrant group or an undocumented immigrant (Stacey et al. 2011), and belonging to a religious minority group (Perry 2001, Wilson 2014) are correlates of victimization, although national data on these measures are not available to compare the magnitude of these correlates.

Low self-control has been found to have a consistent relationship with several forms of victimization. A recent meta-analysis of this topic demonstrates that persons who exhibit higher levels of impulsivity, short-sightedness, and self-centeredness tend to experience more victimization (Pratt et al. 2014). The influence of low self-control is generally modest in size and weakened in models that take into account other factors, especially the behaviors and activity patterns of the individual. It is important to note that the types of victimization used in the studies underlying this meta-analysis typically exclude crimes such as violence against women and children.

Many characteristics are believed to be related to victimization because they either increase a person's exposure to potential offenders via environmental exposures (e.g., income) or are related to the kinds of activities that persons engage in (e.g., age), which may also increase their contact with potential offenders. However, some of these factors represent unique indicators of vulnerability for some types of victimization. For instance, physical limitations may signal weakness and an inability to defend one's self to some offenders, whereas gender identity and religious or ethnic minority status can be characteristics that those motivated to commit hate crimes use to select their victims. Low self-control is unique among these factors in that some part of its influence on victimization is thought to involve victim precipitation.

Behaviors and experiences are known to be associated with victimization risk, and these correlates are generally larger in magnitude than other person-level characteristics. Two of the most robust individual-level predictors of victimization are prior victimization and involvement in delinquency and offending (Lauritsen & Laub 2007). Part of the reason that prior victimization is associated with future risk is that this indicator captures other unmeasured sources of risk (i.e., risk heterogeneity) in multivariate models that are not fully specified. However, it also may represent factors that reflect an individual's responses to prior victimization, such as increased psychological distress (Reijntjes et al. 2010), substance abuse/dependence (Thompson et al. 2008), or increased motivation to engage in retaliatory behaviors that further place individuals at risk for victimization (Jacobs & Wright 2006, Taylor et al. 2008). The psychological impact of victimization is hypothesized to be a key factor underlying the relationship between childhood and later victimization experiences (Desai et al. 2002, Widom et al. 2008). Individual and contextual characteristics, as well as previous victimization experiences, do not account for the consistently robust relationship between victimization and offending, which strongly suggests that some criminal and deviant activities are inextricably dangerous and therefore linked to victimization (Lauritsen & Laub 2007). There is also some evidence to suggest that alcohol consumption can have a situational effect on victimization risk, by increasing either the likelihood of aggression on the part of a potential offender or the cognitive and physical vulnerabilities of potential victims (Felson & Burchfield 2004, Testa & Parks 1996).

Studies of the impact of attitudes and beliefs on victimization constitute a small share of research, in part because of limited data availability and the difficulty of establishing temporal and causal ordering. Longitudinal studies are rare, even though they are the preferred methodology for demonstrating causal relationships. One exception is the research by Stewart et al. (2006) who assessed the independent contribution of attitudes on the victimization risk of African-American youth. The authors found that adoption of "code of the street" attitudes (which emphasize tough and aggressive demeanors to prompt respect from others) increases victimization over and above the contributions of involvement in violent offending, living in a dangerous area, having violent peers, and prior victimization. This is strong evidence that certain norms and attitudes can have an independent influence on victimization.

Household- and Family-Level Correlates

Household- and family-level correlates of victimization have been used as additional measures in individual-level studies of risk and in household-level studies of the predictors of burglary. NCVS-based research has shown that youth living in single-parent households experience more violence than those in married-parent households, and youth who have lived in their homes for longer periods have lower victimization risks net of the effects of sociodemographic and neighborhood characteristics (Lauritsen 2003). Moreover, the magnitude of the relationship between family structure and youth violence increased some between 1994 and 2010 because the declines in violence during this period were larger for youth living with married parents (White & Lauritsen 2012). Family composition is also associated with women's risk for intimate partner violence (Vest et al. 2002) and violence by strangers, with victimization highest among unmarried women with children (Lauritsen & Schaum 2004). Other family factors, such as stressful events and conditions, have been most often considered in studies of intimate partner victimization. Both chronic and acute periods of family economic distress have been found to be associated with family violence, including violence against women (Benson et al. 2003, Fox et al. 2002) and child victimization (Berger 2005, Gelles 1992).

Household-level analyses of burglary have also found that family composition and household income are related to victimization risk. Burglary rates are highest in households composed of

single parents with children and for poorer households (Walters et al. 2013) and are slightly lower in households that are in a gated or walled community or in a building with restricted access (Addington & Rennison 2015). Reliable national data on the association between burglary and home security devices such as alarms are unavailable for the United States; however, data from England and Wales suggest that such devices have only a small relationship to risk once other security features, such as door and window locks, and household composition factors are taken into account (Tseloni et al. 2017).

Community-Level Correlates

Community-level correlates of victimization primarily refer to neighborhood contextual factors that have been shown to be related to property or violent victimization risk. The unit of measure designating a community or neighborhood varies across studies and is most often based on census-tract or block-group definitions because data are available for these types of spatial units. Community-level correlates have been assessed in contextual analyses estimating the relevant contribution of individual and neighborhood characteristics on risk, and in models assessing whether the effects of individual-level factors on risk vary across community conditions. The latter types of models provide important insights into the generalizability of individual-level correlates across social-spatial contexts.

In contextual studies of violence risk, various measures of neighborhood social disorganization have been found to be associated with victimization. Persons living in urban neighborhoods with higher levels of socioeconomic disadvantage are at greater risk for violent victimization (Lauritsen 2001, Miethe & McDowall 1993, Rountree et al. 1994, Sampson et al. 1997). Other commonly used indicators of social disorganization, including racial and ethnic heterogeneity and residential instability, are also correlated with risk, although the magnitude and significance of these factors have been found to vary some depending on the control variables included in the models and the type of violence under consideration (e.g., stranger versus intimate partner, robbery versus assault). Many studies examining the independent role of neighborhood socioeconomic and compositional factors also operationalize these measures in different ways, making it difficult to provide definitive statements about the magnitude of many of these correlates. However, net of individual-level correlates, the association between neighborhood socioeconomic disadvantage and violent victimization risk is robust. Controlling for individual-level sociodemographic characteristics, nonlethal violence risk is estimated to be roughly two to three times greater in the most disadvantaged (versus the most advantaged) urban neighborhoods (Lauritsen 2001). In comparison, only age was found to have a somewhat larger effect on violence risk in these models, with 20-year-olds having risks about four times greater than 50-year-olds.

The key theoretical mechanisms hypothesized by scholars that underlie community processes associated with violent victimization include neighborhood informal social controls, local institutional resources, normative supports for the code of the street, and opportunity factors (Meier & Miethe 1993, Miethe & Meier 1990, Wilcox et al. 2003). Contextual analysis of Chicago neighborhood data has found that collective efficacy—a measure of the level of local social trust and the ability of the neighborhood to engage in informal social control—mediates much of the association between concentrated disadvantage, residential instability, and violent victimization (Sampson et al. 1997). However, a contextual study of the impact of neighborhood processes on the victimization of African-American youth from Iowa and Georgia found that neighborhood social ties had limited direct effect on their victimization. Instead, community levels of support for the code of the street were found to be most influential, suggesting that local norms supporting the use of violence and threats were a more salient neighborhood predictor of victimization (Berg

et al. 2012). Accounting for the differences in these types of findings is challenging because of dissimilarities in the samples and the lack of directly comparable measures.

Although it can be said that community context is an important correlate of victimization, more data and research are needed to further specify and distinguish how these normative and social-control processes operate in contexts in which differences in opportunity may also be present (Meier & Miethe 1993). A key challenge in addressing these types of issues is the lack of necessary community- and individual-level data, and because such data require sufficient sample sizes within communities, they typically have been gathered in a single city. This raises the issue of whether the findings derived from one city are generalizable to other cities or nonurban places. Just as it is important to know whether the effects of individual-level factors on risk vary across community conditions (or temporal periods), it is critical to learn whether the impact of neighborhood-level correlates varies across cities.

In one of the few studies to examine this issue, Rountree & Land (2000) assessed whether the individual- and neighborhood-level covariates of burglary victimization vary across three US cities. They found that the individual-level correlates of burglary did not vary across cities, but that the neighborhood-level correlates appeared to do so because some factors (such as neighborhood income and social integration) were not significantly associated with risk in each of the cities. However, further assessments of the sampling error surrounding these measures showed that the associations were substantively similar across the cities even though some did not attain statistical significance. This suggests that findings about victimization processes in one city are likely to be generalizable to other cities as well. Largely similar conclusions about the substantive consistency of the correlates of violence in cities compared to nonurban areas in the United States are found in Lauritsen (2001).⁴

National- and Subnational-Level Correlates

Compared to the number of individual-level victimization studies, national- and subnational-level studies are relatively rare. National-level research is necessarily limited by the number of available time points for analyses, whereas subnational-level research is limited by the availability of geographic information within national data. The most prominent victimization data in the United States (aside from homicide data) that can be used to address national and subnational research issues are found in the NCVS. The publicly available NCVS data can be used to study differences across regions, within urban-suburban-rural specifications, and for the forty largest metropolitan areas.⁵ The research value of national and subnational data is that they can be used to study the relationships between larger macroproperties and victimization over time as well as to inform discussions of the validity of police-based crime data for studies of the correlates across places.

Subnational research on violence against women has shown that gender inequalities are associated with victimization risk in somewhat different ways depending on whether the violence is committed by strangers or nonstrangers (Xie et al. 2012a). Consistent with feminist hypotheses, increases in women's education, income, and labor force participation are associated with decreases in risk for intimate partner violence; however, consistent with routine activity hypotheses,

⁴We do not discuss the findings about the school-level correlates of victimization, although we note that many of the analytic issues about neighborhood influences on victimization are relevant to assessing school influences. See Wynne & Joo (2011) and Foster & Brooks-Gunn (2013) for general assessments of these correlates and Fisher et al. (1998) for a review of victimization on college campuses.

⁵The NCVS metropolitan statistical area (MSA)-level data are available only for the years 1979 to 2004.

increases in labor force participation are also associated with increases in risk for victimization committed by strangers and known nonintimates. Net of other macrolevel economic indicators, intimate partner victimization has also been found to be lower in metropolitan areas with more police officers and social service workers per capita and unrelated to whether mandatory arrest laws for cases of domestic violence are in place (Xie et al. 2012b). By taking advantage of victimization data across people, places, and time, this type of contextual and longitudinal research provides unique insights into potential policy impacts that are challenging or impossible to study via experimental designs (Sampson et al. 2013).

As shown earlier, studies of the NCVS national-level data reveal how the average risk of victimization has varied over time and also whether individual-level correlates of risk are stable or changing over time. These data have also been used to show how macrolevel socioeconomic trends are correlated with aggregate violent victimization rates. Consistent with much cross-sectional research on homicide data, serious violent victimization rates are greater during periods of higher unemployment, young adult disengagement from conventional institutions, consumer pessimism, and inflation according to a few studies using nearly four decades of annual data post-1973. These victimization rates are also negatively correlated with a lagged indicator of incarceration (Lauritsen et al. 2016). Poverty trends also correspond with these victimization trends (Lauritsen et al. 2014); however, it appears that the strength of these macrolevel correlations declined in the most recent decade, suggesting that some set of factors more prominent in the recent period is moderating the relationship between macroeconomic conditions and violent victimization.

Our analysis of the US victimization trends in **Figure 2** and their correspondence with macrolevel socioeconomic trends indicates that from 1990 to 2013, the poverty rate is not as highly correlated with trends in lethal and nonlethal intimate partner violence and child abuse. However, the trends in these victimization rates are positively correlated with the black poverty rate and statistically significant. Year-to-year changes in the poverty rates, both overall and for blacks, are also significantly associated with year-to-year changes in the rates of lethal and nonlethal intimate partner violence and child abuse.

One final set of correlates found in national analyses concerns opportunity factors related to the rhythmic pattern of seasons or other temporal periods and the availability of targets for victimization. NCVS data show that violent victimizations, such as rape and sexual assault, aggravated assault, and intimate partner violence, are somewhat higher during the summer but that robbery exhibits no clear seasonal pattern. Youth victimization, however, differs from these general patterns in that youth rates of simple assault are lowest during the summer when school is not in session and highest in the fall when school resumes (Carbone-López & Lauritsen 2013). Although seasonal patterns are statistically significant, the magnitude of the seasonal differences is relatively small—differences vary by approximately 10% between the peak and trough seasons (Lauritsen & White 2014).

VICTIMIZATION RESEARCH CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Our review of victimization trends and correlates leads us to several overarching conclusions. First, victimization trends for violent and property crimes have declined considerably since the 1970s, and trends in violence against women and children (for which data are available since the 1990s) have also declined alongside these broader victimization trends. The reasons underlying the high correlations among the long-term trends are not well understood, in part because victimization research tends to be compartmentalized by type of victim and crime type and thus not challenged to explain these similar facts and in part because macrohistorical research on victimization constitutes a minority of studies in the field. Broad theoretical perspectives on victimization,

such as the routine activity approach, provide some insights into how opportunities (e.g., socially structured exposures or proximity to offenders) and guardianship (e.g., formal and informal social controls) may be related to these trends, but there is little specificity in these perspectives as to how these concepts should best be measured in macrohistorical research. Moreover, broad victimization perspectives tend to downplay the role of structural and normative offending motivations, perhaps because they were developed during a period when crime rates appeared to be rising as economic conditions were improving. However, from the 1970s to early 2000s, there are significant and positive macrolevel correlations between measures of serious violent victimization and unemployment, young adult disengagement from conventional institutions, consumer pessimism, inflation, and poverty, suggesting that factors associated with offending must be considered alongside changes in social controls and norms to understand victimization trends. Because the stated purpose of much victimization research is to identify factors that can help reduce victimization and its associated harms, additional research designed to understand these large historical changes in victimization should be a key priority.

Second, limited data availability has made it challenging to conduct multilevel research on victimization risk, and, numerically speaking, the vast majority of studies involve the examination of individual-level factors only. Findings from the most comprehensive of these studies suggest that the strongest individual-level predictors of victimization are age, prior victimization, and involvement in deviant or criminal activities. Without consideration of these factors, the ability to account for a significant proportion of the variation in risk using individual-level analyses is fairly small, in part because victimization is a statistically rare event during a given time frame, therefore making its occurrence difficult to predict. Moreover, because many important forms of victimization have declined considerably over time, the explanatory challenges of individual-level models are greater now than in the past. This suggests that the search for additional individual-level correlates in future research will result in only small improvements at best in these types of analytical models. For practical and policy reasons, it would appear that the most useful individual-level research must be contextual in nature and address two key questions: What factors moderate the well-established relationships between victimization and age, prior victimization, and criminal involvement, and to what extent do these moderating factors represent individual- or contextual-level processes?

Third, multilevel research has demonstrated that sociostructural context has an important and independent association with an individual's risk for violence and property victimization, regardless of whether the context under consideration is the family, school, neighborhood, or larger sociospatial unit. The most consistent of the contextual predictors of risk across different levels of analysis are indicators of socioeconomic disadvantage, but the meaning and interpretation of this correlate are not always clear. For example, at the family level, a measure of household poverty may represent one of various contexts within a family, neighborhood, or other sociospatial unit. Household poverty could be included as a proxy for the type of neighborhood one is likely to live in, as a measure of spatial proximity to offenders or capacity for local guardianship, as a proxy for the number of crises and disputes the family is likely to experience, as an indicator of personal or social capital, or as a measure of one's resources for guardianship and protection. Such reasonable and varied interpretations imply different types of risk-reduction efforts, and clarifying what those efforts should be necessarily requires additional multilevel information. Similar interpretation challenges remain about the meaning of significant correlations between victimization rates and the poverty rates of schools, neighborhoods, and other contextual units, although important theoretical and measurement breakthroughs have been made in multilevel neighborhood-level research, demonstrating that levels of collective efficacy account for much of the relationship between neighborhood-level socioeconomic disadvantage and violent victimization.

However, understanding how such neighborhood-level factors might operate to influence crimes that typically occur in private settings (such as intimate partner and child violence) is less clear, as such victimizations are not as likely to be known to local residents. It is worth noting that many of the hypothesized processes underlying intimate partner and child violence are more difficult to assess because of methodological and ethical reasons, such as mandatory reporting laws in cases of violence against children. The sources of informal social control for these crimes are likely to involve family and friend networks and school and daycare resources, and these may fall outside of the local neighborhood. Thus, even though intimate partner and child violence share many similar correlates and trends with other forms of victimization, this does not necessarily mean that the acting mechanism of social control is the same as that operating for violence committed by strangers or other types of acquaintances. Given the challenges of self-report surveys to capture these processes for intimate partner and child violence, comparative qualitative methodologies are more likely to provide clearer insights into social-control mechanisms than are survey-based multilevel studies.

Fourth, compared to the types of victimizations discussed here, much less is known about the correlates of emerging forms of victimization, particularly those that are technologically facilitated, such as internet fraud, ransomware, social media reputation assaults, bullying and harassment, and identity theft. It is difficult to see why these location-less incidents in which an offender does not have to make physical contact with a victim or his/her property would have similar sets of individual, family, and neighborhood correlates as violent and property victimization. This does not imply that concepts such as opportunity, exposure, vulnerability, control, and protective factors are irrelevant but rather that the levels of analysis for these types of victimizations need to be reconceptualized and that the concepts themselves must be operationalized in new ways to measure the potential risk factors. It remains unknown whether these types of victimizations will increase in the future, and if so, by how much. But it is clear that they represent intellectual challenges for criminologists, as well as practical and policy challenges for technology specialists and society. For these (and other) types of victimization, it is critical for criminologists to pay attention to the fundamental attribution error discussed by Clarke (1980, 2016) and move beyond the search for victimization dispositions and focus instead on the role of opportunities in the occurrence of crime.

Finally, the breadth of victimization research is wide and the volume of research is extensive. The broad summary of trends and correlates in this paper reflects our views about some of the general findings and challenges that victimization researchers have tackled as well as what we see as some of the important unanswered questions. We recognize that other scholars are likely to have emphasized different issues but hope that most would agree that a broader and more comparative view across traditionally compartmentalized fields of victimization research can spur new ideas about the general mechanisms underlying risks and trends and provide suggestions for how assessments of these mechanisms might be improved. Greater understandings of the structure, functioning, and normative aspects of differently defined social contexts provide risk and opportunity structures for crime and can reveal important insights into victimization.

Furthermore, studies of victimization can also tell us much about the nature of a society. The widespread declines over the past several decades in many forms of victimization are an encouraging sign that there have been at least some positive improvements in the structure, functioning, and normative climate of our society. To the extent that the narrowing of the gender gap in violent victimization reflects decreases in gender inequalities across a variety of domains, this finding is also encouraging because the gender gap decreased during a period when both male and female rates were benefitting from declining risks. However, the fact that there has been little change over the long term in the racial/ethnic gaps in violent victimization suggests that progress in addressing racial and ethnic disparities in risk factors may have been minimal.

For this reason, and because it is possible that declines in the overall victimization rates may not continue into the future, we encourage researchers to devote greater attention to understanding how macrohistorical changes may directly influence and moderate the risks for victimization.

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