

Study finds reporting crimes to police reduces likelihood of future victimization

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As law enforcement agencies, community organizations, and public health officials work to develop effective crime-prevention strategies, new research from the University of Iowa finds that individuals who report being victims of crime to police are less likely to become future victims of crime than those who do not report their initial experiences.

The UI study examined a nationwide cohort of more than 18,000 people who were victims of crimes such as interpersonal violence—including sexual assault, robbery, threatened rape and threatened assault—and property crimes like theft and burglary. Data were drawn from the National Crime Victimization Survey, a database of non-fatal crime reports, and covered a period from 2008 to 2012.

Overall, the study found that those who filed police reports about their initial experience were 22 percent less likely to experience repeat victimization. Future interpersonal violence victimizations were 20 percent lower, and future thefts were 27 percent lower. Future burglaries did not decline with police reporting.

The researchers suggest the lower overall rate of future victimization may be attributable to increased awareness of victims, police action, and other services that victims receive after reporting their experience to authorities.

"We know that the role of police in society is to provide safety, and clearly we see that they are succeeding in this role. However, they cannot

be successful without cooperation from the victims and community. That's why it is important to report the victimizations to police," says Shabbar I. Ranapurwala, lead author of the study and postdoctoral research scholar at the UI Injury Prevention Research Center.

The research team also included Mark Berg, associate professor in the UI Department of Sociology, and Carri Casteel, associate professor in the UI Department of Occupational and Environmental Health. The study was published online July 28 in the journal *PLOS ONE*.

According to national estimates, approximately 54 percent of violent victimizations are not reported to the police. In the population studied by UI researchers, 59 percent of crime victims did not report their initial victimization to police.

Initial victimization was reported to the police more often by females (41.8%) than males (39.9%), by African Americans (44.2%) more often than whites (40.6%), and by non-Hispanics (41.6%) more than Hispanics (36.7%). The most often reported initial victimization was burglary (59.1%), followed by interpersonal violence (51.5%) and theft (34.4%).

Many crimes are not reported to police because of the fear of repercussions or because the crime is considered trivial, the authors say.

"When victimizations are not reported to the police, this creates significant inaccuracies or errors in crime-rate estimates generated from official law enforcement data," says Berg.

"Victim non-reporting, therefore, has significant consequences for policy," he adds. "For instance, the annual allocation of crime-control resources is partly determined by variations in serious [crime](#) rates, information that is based on official data sources."

The researchers suggest that better understanding of how reporting to [police](#) affects future victimization could help [law enforcement](#) and other government agencies better engage with victims, particularly those in minority communities, who experience higher rates of victimization. Such engagement can also include linking [victims](#) with services (e.g., social, financial, emotional, and legal) offered by local or state government, or by community organizations.

More information: Shabbar I. Ranapurwala et al, Reporting Crime Victimization to the Police and the Incidence of Future Victimization: A Longitudinal Study, *PLOS ONE* (2016). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0160072](#)

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