

---

**Victims of Crime and the Psychological Effects of their Experience. A Case Study of South-South Region of Nigeria**

---

By

**Emmanuel Amos UMANA, PhD, FNIM, FCIARB, FCIMC, CFE(USA)**

**Department of Sociology,  
Obong University, Obong Ntak,  
Akwa Ibom State**

**&**

**Michael Jack EYO, MNI, Ph.D  
Department of Political Science  
Obong University**

---

**Abstract**

*In Nigeria, unlike England, the sentencing policies rely heavily on the punishment of the offender to the neglect of the victims remedy. This study intends to x-ray the victims of crime and the psychological effects of their experiences. A case study of the South-South region of Nigeria. The method adopted to gather data was to administer questionnaire to respondents. A total of 600 questionnaires were administered randomly to indigenes of each of the states that make up the region. The research employed lifestyle/exposure theory. The research also employed chi-square in the analysis and testing of hypotheses. The research revealed that victims of crime in Nigeria are not compensated.*

***Keywords: Victims, Crime, Psychological effects of victimization***

---

**Introduction**

The rate of insecurity in Nigeria has produced many crime victims, and the criminal justice system in Nigeria has not been able to grapple with crime and criminals with a view to finding a solution to victimization. This precarious and varied situation has given rise to the total neglect of crime victims in Nigeria. According to *Easton, (2010)*, crime is an unlawful act punishable by a state or other authority. The term "crime" does not, in modern criminal law, have any simple and universally accepted definition, though statutory definitions have been provided for certain purposes. One proposed definition is that a crime or offence (or criminal offence) is an act harmful not only to some individual but also to a community, society or the state ("a public wrong"). Such acts are forbidden and punishable by law (Farmer 2008). Criminal activities range from violent crime with /without injury, to robbery, domestic burglary, and domestic violent with/without injury, theft involving vehicles, other personal theft and household theft. These activities can pose living difficulties, fears and stigmatization to individuals and organizations emotionally, psychologically, and social levels. The impact of crime on individuals or a person is termed Victimization. Yussuf & Yahaya (2014)

Given that victimization risks are not uniformly distributed across time and space, lifestyles are assumed to affect the probability of victimization because different lifestyles are associated with differential risks of being in particular places, at particular times, under particular circumstances, and interacting with particular kinds of persons. Accordingly, persons who are

younger, male, not married, low income, usually have higher risks of violent victimization than their counterparts because each group is said to engage in more public activity (especially at night), spend less time with family members, or associate more frequently with persons who have offender characteristics. However, fear of crime impacts a much larger population, influencing their mundane personal decisions, such as a late night stroll in a particular neighborhood, to important life choices, like purchase of real estate. Increasing fear of crime may further cause individuals to withdraw physically and psychologically from community life. It can also lead to psychological distress, depression and feeling of powerlessness (Ross et al, 2000).

### **Statement of Problem**

The rate at which victims of crime in Nigeria had been neglected is on the rise. Victims of crime are confronted by a number of needs, financial, physical, emotional, economic and psychological. Many victims of crime are further confronted by the trauma of the loss of lives, or the loss of a loved one or the loss of their life time investments to mention only a few owing to crimes of a violent nature. Crime victims form part of criminal justice in any jurisdiction, but crime victim's relevance has not been given due recognition in Nigeria in terms of compensation. This study therefore seeks to investigate into the psychological effects of crime victims in South-South Region of Nigeria.

### **Research Objectives**

This study intends to x-ray the victims of crime and the psychological effects of their experiences. A case study of the South-South region of Nigeria. It specifically seeks to find out

1. The type of criminal activities prevalent in South-South region of Nigeria.
2. Psychological effects of crime such as major depression thought of suicide, use and abuse of alcohol and social withdrawal.

### **Research Questions**

1. What criminal activities are prevalent in South-South region of Nigeria?
2. To what extent does crime affect victims psychologically and emotionally in South-South region of Nigeria?

### **Research Hypotheses**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant psychological effect of crime on victims in South-South region of Nigeria.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant psychological effect of crime on victims in South-South region of Nigeria.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Theoretical Framework: Lifestyle-Exposure Theories of Victimization**

Life style exposure theory, one of the first systematic theories of criminal victimization was developed by Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo (1978) more than thirty years ago. The theory was originally proposed to account for differences in the risks of violent victimization across social groups, but it has been extended to include property crime, and it forms the basis for more elaborate theories of target- selection processes. The basic premise underlying the

lifestyle-exposure theory is that demographic differences in the likelihood of victimization is attributed to differences in the personal lifestyles of victims. Lifestyle is defined in this context as "routine daily activities, both vocational activities (work, school, keeping house, etc.) and leisure activities" (Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo 1978, p. 241). Variations in lifestyles are important because they are related to the differential exposure to dangerous places, times, and other situations in which there are high risks of victimization. An individual's lifestyle is the critical factor that determines risks of criminal victimization. People's daily activities may naturally bring them into contact with crime, or they merely increase the risk of crime that victims experience. Time spent in one's home generally decreases victim risk, while time spent in public settings increases risk. Differences in lifestyle is socially determined by individuals' collective responses or adaptations to various role expectations and structural constraints. Both ascribed and achieved status characteristics (e.g., age, gender, race, income, marital status, education, occupation) are important correlates of predatory crime because these status attributes carry with them shared expectations about appropriate behavior and structural obstacles that both enable and constrain one's behavioral choices. Adherence to these cultural and structural expectations leads to the establishment of routine activities patterns and associations with others similarly situated. These lifestyles and associations, in turn, are expected to enhance one's exposure to risky or vulnerable situations that increase individuals' chances of victimization. Under this theoretical model, individuals' risks of property victimization should also be higher among those social groups (e.g., young, male, single persons) who spend more time engaged in public activity because such persons would be less able to protect their dwelling from crime.

### **Conceptual framework**

While every crime violates the law, not every violation of the law counts as a crime. Breaches of private law (torts and breaches of contract) are not automatically punished by the state, but can be enforced through civil procedure. Usually, for an action to be classified as a crime, the "act of doing something criminal" (*actus reus*) must with certain exceptions, be accompanied by the "intention to do something criminal" (*mens rea*) (Martin, 2003). The notion that acts such as murder, rape and theft are to be prohibited which exists worldwide. What precisely is a criminal offence is defined by criminal law of each country. While many have a catalogue of crimes called the criminal code, in some common law countries no such comprehensive statute exists. The state (government) has the power to severely restrict one's liberty for committing a crime. In modern societies, there are procedures to which investigations and trials must adhere. If found guilty, an offender may be sentenced to a form of reparation such as a community sentence, or, depending on the nature of their offence, to undergo imprisonment, life imprisonment or, in some jurisdictions, execution.

### **Criminal Activities in South-South Nigeria**

Criminal activities range from violent crime with /without injury, to robbery, domestic burglary, and domestic violent with/without injury, theft involving vehicles, other personal theft and household theft. These activities can pose living difficulties, fears and stigmatization to individuals and organizations emotionally, psychologically, and social levels. There is no such thing as a victimless crime. Crime can have repercussions that last for years, either short term trauma such as: physiological anxiety, including rapid heart rate, hyperventilation, stomach distress, shock, feeling of guilt, and helplessness; or long term traumatic experiences which include: major depression, thought of suicide, use and abuse of alcohol, anxiety disorders and changing views of the society as a safe place. Greatest among these effects which possibly out-

live every other effect is the psychological effect called “trauma” often used to describe the experience of crime victims. Trauma refers to both a medical and a psychiatric condition. “Medically, ‘trauma’ refers to a serious or critical bodily injury, wound, or shock. Psychiatrically, ‘trauma’ has assumed a different meaning and refers to an experience that is emotionally painful, distressful, or shocking, which often results in lasting mental and physical effects” (National Institute of Mental Health, 2006, p. 2). The effects of crime could be grouped into emotional/psychological, financial, spiritual, physical and/or social. For the purpose of this study, the emotional/psychological effects shall be discussed.

### **Emotional/Psychological Impact**

Victims of a crime are put in situations beyond their control. Following the initial shock, the **psychological impact** may cause a victim to go through a period of disorganized activity. They may act out following sexual assaults, leading to destructive or unsafe behavior. They may have distressing thoughts about the event, trouble sleeping. They may use substance abuse as a coping mechanism and withdraw socially. They may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Shapland, and Hall, 2007). Other effects such as anger, depression or fear, which, in serious cases, can cause sleeplessness or flashbacks to the offence, may persistently linger on the mind of the victim. Feelings of anxiety through shock that such a thing has happened and worries about victimization, sometimes leading to feelings of loss of trust in one’s community and in society because of unease (Kukori, 2013). The effects of a crime can be felt not only by the individual who the criminal justice system treats as the direct victim, but also by their family and those close to them. The knowledge of victimization and its shock can spread out through a neighborhood creating a ‘ripple effect’. Some effects may only be short-term while other effects can be very long-lasting, over months or even years. A large proportion of the most seriously affected (who tends to be victims of serious physical assaults, robberies and particularly rape, as well as the relatives of victims of homicide) may develop PTSD, which will need professional psychiatric or psychological help.

### **Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

The American Psychiatric Association (2000) describes a characteristic set of symptoms that develop after exposure to an extreme stressor that are capable of producing PTSD to include sexual assault, physical attack, robbery, mugging, kidnapping, or child sexual assault, as well as observing the serious injury or death of another person due to violent assault and learning about the violent personal assault or death of a family member or close friend. According to a study conducted by (Bonne, Brandes, Bilboa, et al., 2001), people who respond to these stressors with intense fear, helplessness, or horror, and whose symptoms persist over a specified length of time and influence their functioning in major areas of life, may be experiencing symptoms of PTSD. In such cases, appropriate medical attention is required. However, PTSD is a psychiatric illness that can only be diagnosed by a trained professional.

The following are characteristic symptoms after a traumatic event:

- Persistent experiencing of the event (i.e., distressing dreams, distressing recollections, flashbacks, or emotional or physiological reactions when exposed to something that resembles the traumatic event).
- Persistent avoidance of things associated with the traumatic event or reduced ability to be close to other people and experience or sustain loving feelings.

- Persistent symptoms of increased arousal (i.e., sleep difficulties, outbursts of anger, difficulty concentrating, constantly being on guard, extreme startle response).

Traumatic experiences can affect children as well as adult mentally. A person who has been exposed to traumatic events may be predisposed to react to all situations as potentially dangerous. Physiological changes, such as the release of stress hormones, can cause victims to become hyper vigilant, fearful, and anxious. The parts of our brains that control higher order functions such as social skills, emotional control, and logical thinking are among the last areas to develop. If a child experiences trauma in the early years, normal brain development may be affected, making it more difficult to develop these higher order skills. The causal relationship between trauma and brain adaptation, however, is not without controversy. Some scientists question whether a preexisting brain anomaly might serve as a risk factor for development of PTSD following a person's exposure to trauma (Stein, Hanna, Koverola, Torchia, and McClarty, 2007). Some people are more vulnerable to trauma than others. Coping mechanisms, age, social supports, and drug use are all mitigating factors. Anyone can get PTSD. It is a "normal response to an abnormal occurrence." the extent of the impact on the victim is influenced by such factors as type of crime, victim's characteristics, financial circumstances, the support available and the seriousness of the incident. What victims need to help them cope and recover from the crime can vary. While many victims have several of the same needs, not every victim has all needs; the characteristics of both the incident and the individual can influence the number and nature of the required needs.

### **The Nigerian Approach towards Victim of Crime**

There is no doubt that the Nigeria criminal justice system recognizes the salient third party, the victim in line with the preliminary provisions of the administration of criminal justice Act recently passed into law in 2015 thus;

"The purpose of this Act is to ensure that the system of the administration of criminal justice in Nigeria promotes efficient management of criminal justice institutions, speedy dispensation of justice, protection of the society from crime and protection of the rights and interest of the suspects, the defendant and the victim". In spite of this provision of the law, the interest of the victim is still always submerged in the interest of the society whose norms and values are affronted by the commission of a crime. For this reason, there is a paucity of provisions in Nigeria criminal statues dwelling on the interests of victim of crime. The statutes are defective, inadequately addressing the financial, emotional and psychological problems of the victim in Nigeria, and therefore could not provide the victim with necessary and adequate remedies as obtainable in other foreign jurisdictions. This situation of victim of crime in Nigeria has long been recognized by Prince Bola Ajibola in Lamborn who posited that "There has always been a serious dearth of provision within our legal system to guarantee the rights of the victims and to design procedures and institutional framework needed to ensure that a victim can obtain compensation where he suffers harm, injury or damages as a result of commission of crime "It is really sad that even the recent ACJA 2015 could not make adequate or provide institutional framework needed to ensure that the victim of crime can obtain adequate compensation in line with international standard and best practices (Lamborn 1990)

The psychological traumas that victim usually undergoes and how that can be redress are not provided for in these provisions. Again, the courts have the discretion to award compensation or not. This discretion is left to the presiding judicial officer. The provision does not take

cognizance of the jurisdictional limits in terms of the amount that the various courts may award. While some courts have limited jurisdiction, others have unlimited jurisdiction in terms of sentence they can impose which had resulted in arbitrary use of discretion to the detriment of the victim. The provisions in section 78 of penal code which is to the effect that any person who is convicted of an offence under this code may be adjudged to make compensation to any person injured by his offence and such compensation may be either in addition to or substitution of any other punishment are not only inadequate but also defeat in the purpose they are meant to serve.

Again, the provisions of the criminal procedure Act (CPA) make room for compensation but the compensation is intended to serve the interest of an accused person who has been discharged and acquitted on charges of crime. However, section 435 (2) provides compensation for the victim up to the sum of Twenty Naira, while this may have been adequate earlier on or as at when this law was made, obviously, it is unrealistic considering the present situation of inflation in Nigeria today. Therefore, it leaves the victim with no option other than to resort to his civil remedies which are fought with difficulty for an indigent victim who may not have the wherewithal to pursue his claims (Karibi 1990).

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This study adapted the descriptive survey design

### **Population of the Study**

The population of the study consists of 300 respondents (Nigerian police and Judiciary) for the purpose of this study.

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

This study adopted the simple random sampling technique in selecting 300 respondents for the study.

### **Research Instrument**

The study used the questionnaire methods for data collection. The questionnaire is designed using the four point Likert type scale and divided into two sections (section A and B). Section A elicited information about respondent personal data while section B consisted of information on the dimension of victims of crime and the psychological effects of their experience.

### **Validation of the Instrument**

The instrument was face and content validated by an expert from test and measurement and evaluation in University of Uyo.

### **Reliability of the Instrument**

Test-retest reliability was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. In the trial testing, 30 respondents who were not part of the main study were randomly selected and the instrument administered on them. Data collected from the respondents were subjected to test-retest statistical analysis using Cronbach Alpha and the test gave an average reliability coefficient of 0.89 which was high enough to justify the use of the instrument.

### **Technique for Data Analysis and Model Specification**

This study used descriptive statistic as well percentage analysis to analyze the data in respect of the research questions. However, for the hypotheses the researcher used chi-square analysis to test them. Test for significance was done at 0.05 alpha levels.

**Results and Discussions**

**Research Question One**

The research question sought to find out the criminal activities prevalent in South-South region of Nigeria.

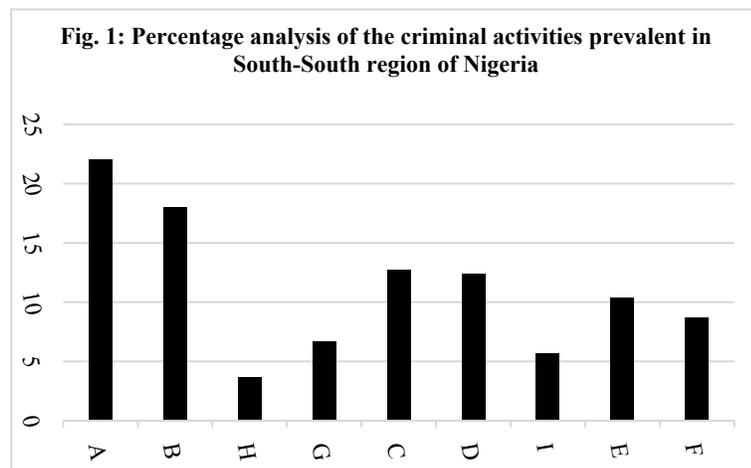
**Table 1: Percentage analysis to find out the criminal activities prevalent in South-South region of Nigeria**

Responses	Freq.	Percentage (%)
Violent crime with injury	66	22**
Violent crime without injury	54	18
Robbery	11	3.67
Domestic burglary	20	6.67
Domestic violent with injury	38	12.67
Domestic violent without injury	37	12.33
Theft involving vehicles	17	5.67*
personal theft	31	10.33
Household theft	26	8.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

**SOURCE: Field survey**

\*\* The highest percentage frequency

\* The least percentage frequency



A	Violent crime with injury
B	Violent crime without injury
H	Robbery
G	Domestic burglary
C	Domestic violent with injury
D	Domestic violent without injury
I	Theft involving vehicles
E	personal theft
F	Household theft

**SOURCE: Field survey**

The above table 1 and figure 1 present the percentage analysis of the criminal activities prevalent in South-South region of Nigeria. From the result, it was observed that the highest percentage 66(22%) affirmed that the criminal activities prevalent in South-South region of Nigeria is violent crime with injury, the second to the highest 54(18%) said it is violent without injury. The third to the highest respondent 38(12.67%) responded that it is domestic violent with injury, following the third on the list 37(12.33%) responded that it is domestic violent without injury. 31(10.33%) of the respondent identified to be the fifth to the highest said criminal activities prevalent in South-South region of Nigeria is personal theft, following this was 26(8.67%) of the respondent who responded it is household theft. The seventh to the highest respondent on the list

was 20(6.67%) who responded that the criminal activities prevalent in South-South region of Nigeria is domestic burglary. Second to the least respondent on the subject matter was 17(5.67%) who said theft involving vehicles, while the least was 11(3.67%) who said robbery.

**Research Question Two**

The research question sought to find out the extent crime affect victims psychologically and emotionally in South-South Region of Nigeria.

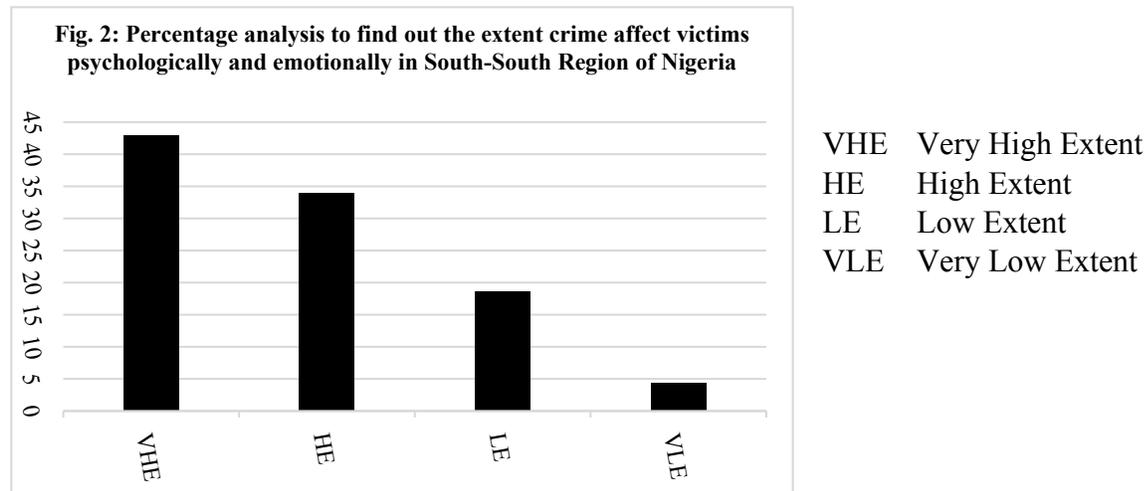
**Table 2: Percentage analysis to find out the extent crime affect victims psychologically and emotionally in South-South Region of Nigeria**

Responses	Freq.	Percentage (%)
Very High Extent	129	43**
High Extent	102	34
Low Extent	56	18.67
Very Low Extent	13	4.33*
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

**SOURCE: Field survey**

\*\* The highest percentage frequency

\* The least percentage frequency



**SOURCE: Field survey**

The above table 2 and figure 2 present the percentage analysis of the extent crime affect victims psychologically and emotionally in South-South Region of Nigeria. From the result, it was observed that the highest percentage 129(43%) affirmed that the extent to which crime affect victims psychologically and emotionally in South-South Region of Nigeria is very high, second to the highest percentage of respondent on the list was 102(34%) who said high extent. Second to the least was 56(18.67%) of the respondent who responded low extent, while the least percentage 13(4.33%) said very low extent.

**Hypothesis Testing**

**Hypothesis 1**

The null hypothesis states that there is no significant psychological effect of crime on victims in South-South region of Nigeria. (See table 3)

**Table 3: Chi-square analysis of the psychological effect of crime on victims in South-South region of Nigeria.**

Gender	Observed Freq	Expected Freq	X <sup>2</sup>
Very High Extent	129	75	104.67F*
High Extent	102	75	
Low Extent	56	75	
Very Low Extent	13	75	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>300</b>	

**\*Significant at 0.05 level; df = 4; Critical = 9.49**

Table 3 shows the calculated X<sup>2</sup>-value as (104.67). This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical X<sup>2</sup>-value (9.49) at 0.05 levels with 4 degree of freedom. The calculated X<sup>2</sup>-value (104.67) was greater than the critical X<sup>2</sup>-value (9.49). Hence, the result was significant. The result therefore means that there is significant psychological effect of crime on victims in South-South region of Nigeria.

### Discussion of Findings

The result of the data analysis in table 3 was significant due to the fact that the calculated X<sup>2</sup>-value 104.67 was greater than the critical X<sup>2</sup>-value of 9.49 at 0.5 alpha level with 4 degree of freedom. The result therefore means that there is significant psychological effect of crime on victims in South-South region of Nigeria. The significance of the result is in agreement with the findings of Shapland, and Hall (2007), who stated that victims of a crime are put in situations beyond their control. Following the initial shock, the psychological impact may cause a victim to go through a period of disorganized activity, they may act out following sexual assaults, leading to destructive or unsafe behavior, they may have distressing thoughts about the event, trouble sleeping. Also, they may use substance abuse as a coping mechanism and withdraw socially. He also state that they may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The significance of the result caused the null hypotheses to be rejected while the alternative one was accepted.

### Conclusions

From the findings of the study, it could be concluded that there is very high extent of crime in South-South region of Nigeria and that the extent to which criminal activities affects victims psychologically in South-South region of Nigeria is of very high extent too. The study also revealed that the most prevalent criminal activities in South-South region of Nigeria are violent crime with injury. Lastly the result also revealed that there is significant psychological effect of crime on victims in South-South region of Nigeria.

### Recommendation

Based on the review and findings of the study, the following recommendations were submitted:

1. The researcher recommends that victims of crime should be assisted by the state whether the offender can be found or not or whether the offender chooses to serve jail term or is impecunious.

2. Compensation programmes should be enforced by the judicial system as it will encourage more citizens to report crime.
3. Also, individuals, NGOs, and religious groups should assist crime victims in Nigeria.

---

REFERENCES

- American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV-TR*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Bonne, O., D. Brandes, A. Gilboa, T.(2001) Longitudinal MRI Study of Hippocampal Volume in Trauma Survivors with PTSD.*The American Journal of Psychiatry*.158: 1248–1251.
- Easton, M ( 2010). *What is crime?* BBC News. Archived from the original on 27 February 2013. Retrieved 10 June 2013.
- Elzinga, B.M., and J.D. Bremner. 2001. Are the Neural Substrates of Memory the Final Common Pathway in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)? *Journal of Affective Disorders*70: 1–17.
- Farmer, Lindsay (2008): *Crime, definitions of*, in Cane and Conaghan (editors), *The New Oxford Companion to Law*, Oxford University Press, (ISBN 978-0-19-929054-3), p. 263
- Hindelang, Michael S., Michael Gottfredson, and James Garofalo. (1978). *Victims of Personal Crime*. Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger.
- Karibi Whyte, *National policy on compensation to victim of crime. How Desirable*. Federal Ministry of Justice, Lagos: (1990).
- Kennedy, Leslie, and David Forde. 1990. Routine Activity and Crime: An Analysis of Victimization in Canada.*Criminology* 28:137-51.
- Kuroki, M. (2013). Crime victimization and subjective well-being: Evidence from happiness data. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 14, 783-794.
- Lamborn L. L, (1990). Victims in the Criminal Justice Process: An American Perspective in Compensation and Remedies for Victims of Crime in Nigeria (ed Bola Ajibola) *Federal Ministry of Justice Law Review Series*, 5(1).
- Miethe, Terance D., Mark C. Stafford, and J. Scott Long. 1987. Social Differentiation in Criminal Victimization: A Test of Routine Activities/ Lifestyle Theory.*American Sociological Review* 52:184-4.
- Nada-Raja, S., & Skegg, K. (2011). Victimization, posttraumatic stress disorder symptomatology, and later nonsuicidal self-harm in a birth cohort. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 26, 1-15.
- National Institute of Mental Health, National Institutes of Health. 2002. Facts About Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. Retrieved December 21, 2006, from [www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/ptsdfacts.cfm](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/ptsdfacts.cfm).
- Ross CE, Reynolds JR, Geis KJ. The contingent meaning of neighborhood stability for residents psychological well-being. *American Sociological Review*.2000:581–597.

---

Shapland, J. and Hall, M. (2007) ‘What do we know about the effects of crime on victims?’  
*International Review of Victimology*, vol. 14, pp. 175-217.

Stein, M.B., D. Hanna, C. Koverola, M. Torchia, and B. McClarty. 2007. Structural Brain Changes in PTSD: Does Trauma Alter Neuroanatomy? *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1(1): 76–82.

Yussuf, U.A. & Yahaya S.S. (2014). Crime victims and criminal justice administration in Nigeria. *Global Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*. 3(5)pg 48.

