

Psychological Effects of Witnessing a Crime and Exposure to Various Types of Violence

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ABSTRACT

Crime means wrongs done by human beings. The commission of act which is prohibited by law of the land. Witnessing a traumatic event but not directly experiencing it can be psychologically quite damaging. Witnessing a crime can majorly affect the people whether the children, adult or an aged person who have witness the crime. You may feel shocked, fearful or angry. A common reaction is feeling numb and having trouble believing that this has happened to you. You may suffer from mental, physical and emotional harm. In fact, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder has recognized that learning of or witnessing traumatic events experienced by friends or family can contribute to PTSD. For example a child who repeatedly witnesses physical and emotional abuse of his/her mother or sibling, can develop PTSD. While effects of direct trauma are evident, consequences of indirect or secondary trauma are often ignored and also the role of social support in the consequences of these experiences are unclear. We will discuss this in detail in the research paper. In this paper, I will collect secondary data by going through books, review paper and some online sites. This paper will show how witnessing a crime and exposure to various types of violence can have a major effect on witnesses. How witness is protected from the offender when he/she has witnessed a heinous crime. After becoming a witness what all he/she has to go through.

Keywords: witnesses, crime, PTSD, trauma, Mental Disorder, stress, social support, depression and anxiety

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I. INTRODUCTION

An act that is undertaken in violation of a law that forbids it or that is omitted in violation of a law that requires it is referred to as a crime. Depending on the offence, one may be sentenced to death, imprisonment, fines, or other limitations. A crime violates morals.

At some point in our lives, many of us have been the victim of a crime, or at least been close to someone who did. These offences might be as minor as a criminal taking a handbag or as terrible as assault, robbery, sexual assault, or even murder. It is important to understand that reactions may not be the same for everyone, and reactions are not always proportional to the severity of the crime. Because each person is unique, the consequences of crimes vary. There is no "right way" to respond to crime.

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One thing that can make dealing with a crime difficult is knowing that the other person did it on purpose. Crimes are committed with the intent to harm, unlike accidents or illnesses. Typically, a crime comes as a surprise, and we cannot anticipate all of its repercussions. Criminal activity can seem surreal and like a nightmare. Anxiety creates discomfort and a feeling of worthlessness and consumes an excessive amount of mental space.

Violence, an act of physical force that causes or is intended to generate harm. Violence can cause harm that is either physical, psychological, or both. Aggression, a broader category of aggressive behaviour that might take the form of physical, verbal, or unresisting behaviour, can be distinguished from violence. There are numerous cases of violence committed by people all throughout the world. The vast majority of the deaths that result from it happen in low- to middle-income nations. Children are particularly susceptible to the dangerous impacts of violence, which have an array of negative effects on individuals who watch or witness them. Violence can take many different forms, including verbal abuse, financial abuse, spiritual abuse, emotional abuse, psychological abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, and many others.

One of the most horrific crimes against victims is domestic abuse. The mind, health, and peace of the individual who has experienced domestic violence as well as the one who has watched the same crime may be significantly impacted.

The victim of crime or any form of violence frequently feels bad about what happened and thinks they contributed to or made the act possible. Even while crime might have serious short-term consequences, most people don't experience any long-term negative effects. A few people experience a severe, protracted reaction to the incident called as post-traumatic stress disorder, and occasionally people do acquire long-term issues including depression or anxiety-related disorders (PTSD).

Most critically, crime witness trauma frequently remains undetected. If witnesses don't obtain the assistance they require, they may develop PTSD and acute stress disorder. It's crucial to avoid viewing these crimes' photographs too frequently. Repeatedly watching these events on television or keeping up with all the developments on social media will only rekindle the anguish.

The trauma of violence against children is common. A child's emotional growth, social development, and intellectual performance are all impacted by abuse and neglect, and all of these consequences can result in troublesome behaviour. Abuse or neglect can impair a child's cognitive development, disrupt sleep patterns, impair memory, and delay language acquisition, all of which can impede academic and social growth. This frequently takes place in the child's carrier setting and has a detrimental impact on the child's ability to form healthy attachments and develop normally. When compared to children who had not been exposed to any type of domestic violence, the psychosocial outcomes of children who had been exposed to domestic violence were much worse. Every person will experience domestic violence differently. Depending on the diploma of the trauma, publicity of domestic violence may have a number of developmental outcomes on youngsters that may begin as early as conception and last through adulthood.

Nonetheless, there are techniques and ways to deal with seeing crimes committed and being exposed to other forms of violence, as well as how doing so can help the victim recover their mental health and peace of mind following the crime.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recognizing trauma and how victims may be affected

Everyone is affected differently by becoming a victim of crime, which may be a highly distressing event. It's crucial to keep in mind that the perceived "seriousness" of a crime does not always correspond with the effects it has on a certain person. It's very normal for even the tiniest situations to occasionally cause strong emotional reactions. Some people are shocked by how emotional they become following a crime. These intense feelings may leave you feeling even more uneasy and perplexed. Depending on the vulnerability and resilience of the victim, their personal traits, experiences, and social interactions affect their capacity to cope with victimisation can have a detrimental influence on mental health and, in some situations, result in severe mental illnesses like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It's possible for the victim of crime to have eating disorders, depression, or engage in self-destructive behaviour. Similar to using alcohol or narcotics, there is a chance that someone will have suicidal thoughts or attempt to commit suicide. Because a person may not always be able to think clearly after a terrible incident, the idea that the suffering would eventually lessen does not always provide solace. The sufferer could feel alone and helpless. Resentment or seeking retribution can "poison the mind," along with many forms of rage, violence, sadness, and agony. Trauma's effects may show up right away after the incident or months or years afterwards. They may only be perceived momentarily or have the potential to have a long-term impact on the victim.

Recognizing trauma and its potential effects on witnesses

Although every scenario is unique, the majority of individuals find it upsetting and unsettling to unintentionally witness a crime or horrific event. Even if you weren't physically hurt, what you saw or heard could still have an impact on your mental health. Witnesses frequently go through a variety of powerful emotions, including shock and disbelief, fear, helplessness, rage, or grief. Some folks could feel overburdened. Others might initially feel numb and unresponsive. Some victims may experience guilt and persistent pondering. You might have unsettling thoughts or memories about what you saw, as well as nightmares or flashbacks that make you feel as though it's happening to you again. People frequently strive to avoid anything that triggers regretful recollections.

Effect of Witnessing Domestic Violence as a Child

Everyone who is exposed to domestic violence, including offenders, victims, and children who witness the violence, is affected. In order to effectively comprehend the systems that are also impacted by this violent act, it is crucial to appreciate the complexities of domestic violence. It is easy to overlook the problems of children who have experienced domestic violence. Although it may appear that the kids are doing well, or that the parents

are doing everything in their power to shield the kids from the violent incidents, the effects of seeing the events firsthand are negative. Children who witness domestic violence are not always in the direct line of the assault. Many children can remember incredibly frightening events that they heard about but have never seen the actual act of violence. The social, emotional, physical, and psychological growth of a child who has experienced domestic abuse will be impacted.

If you are acquainted with the offender

If the criminal was someone you know, like a friend or family member, it can be even harder. You can feel betrayed or as though your trust has been violated. You might experience hurt, confusion, or any number of other complicated feelings.

Crime witness trauma frequently goes undiagnosed

We are aware that a crime affects the immediate victim and their family, she continues. Yet, there is unquestionably a ripple effect that many people fail to notice, and that is the witnesses.

Priority should be given to providing a witness with a secure and encouraging atmosphere as they recover from "a heightened state of 'freeze, fight, or panic'" following a violent event.

Acute Distress Disorder, however, can occur in 50% of witnesses, victims, or survivors of catastrophic crimes or disasters.

Adapting to the effects

There is no one right way to deal with situations and no one way to process trauma, stress, and rage. Employ your standard coping mechanisms: Consider taking some extra "me time" to meditate, pray, exercise, connect with and spend time with a loved one. It is crucial that the criminal victim receives assistance as quickly as possible. It is typical for the event to seem unimportant in the days immediately following the crime. The human mind is shielded from harsh emotions by shock.

When the victim is given the chance to discuss his or her experiences and the feelings they have brought on, the coping process moves more quickly and effectively. Some may find it helpful to handle the subject by reading, going outside, or listening to music. Both psychologically and practically, it may be helpful to have the support of close friends and family members. Early intervention with witnesses or victims can prevent psychological issues from becoming entrenched.

The goal is that these symptoms will away over a few weeks if folks are getting the care they need.

When officers arrive at a crime scene or conduct an investigation, they must be aware of those who are in distress. They must remember the victim's and the witness's current mental state and the experiences they have had. The police should give them plenty of time to return to their wits, and then they can discuss the entire case's details and everything they have observed. This phase is important because if police won't work with the victim and witnesses, they won't work with police either.

Assisting kids in coping

In the case that they witness a horrific event, children are also likely to require care and support. Children frequently behave differently from adults, so parents must be patient and understanding.

III. METHODOLOGY

As I mentioned above, there are difficulties that a person faces after seeing a crime and being exposed to various types of violence, but there are steps they may take to get through those difficulties. I'll now go into detail about my research process and data collection. I began by browsing a variety of websites to see which ones are beneficial and offer the appropriate information. Considering the best way to utilise it to explain the problem and the solution to everyone, in order to make them understand the importance of caring for oneself as best as possible after seeing or being exposed to a crime.

I looked through a lot of websites and research journals to acquire secondary data for this essay through a variety of websites and academic journals. Even though this topic hasn't been the subject of many study papers, I tried to read as much as I could to get a sense of it and make sure the information is true. Everyone falls inside my target demographic because this is a sensitive subject that needs to be known by all.

For this study report, I ran the data through a software tool for a more in-depth analysis. Part of the information was directly copied from the websites, which I then edited with my own words. Several websites offer information that is essentially the same, which was a problem I ran into when collecting data.

Because there isn't much material available on this topic online, it was a bit difficult for me to do the work, but I did it. The findings of the data organisation and analysis are listed on the next page.

IV. RESULTS

The brain processes stressful experiences in the same way whether they are witnessed directly or indirectly (through television). It's vital to keep in mind that indicators of concern might sometimes appear right away and other times they can be delayed, even by years. Sustained melancholy, anxiety, depressed moods, reduced everyday functioning, poor appetite, weight loss or gain, and persistent emotions of helplessness are all indications that a person is responding to trauma.

Witnessing a crime and being exposed to violence can have a similar range of psychological effects on individuals, depending on the nature of the crime, the severity of the incident, and the individual's personal characteristics and coping mechanisms. Some of the potential psychological effects of witnessing a crime include:

1. **Trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):** PTSD is a mental health condition that can develop after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. such as intrusive thoughts, nightmares, flashbacks, and avoidance behaviors. PTSD can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity, and it can be triggered by a wide range of traumatic experiences, such as combat, sexual or physical assault, natural disasters, serious accidents, or terrorist attacks.

Symptoms of PTSD can include:

- **Intrusive thoughts:** Recurrent and unwanted memories of the traumatic event, flashbacks, or nightmares.
- **Avoidance:** It is the act of avoiding people, places, or circumstances that trigger memories of the painful experience.
- **Negative thoughts and feelings:** Persistent negative thoughts about oneself, others, or the world, feelings of guilt, shame, or fear, or a loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyable.
- **Hyperarousal:** Difficulty sleeping, irritability, hypervigilance, or an exaggerated startle response.

PTSD can significantly impact a person's ability to function in daily life, including work, relationships, and personal well-being. However, with the right treatment, people with PTSD can learn to manage their symptoms and improve their quality of life. Treatment options for PTSD may include therapy, medication, or a combination of both, and may vary depending on the individual's specific needs and preferences.

2. **Anxiety and depression:** Witnessing a crime can cause anxiety and fear, particularly if the individual feels unsafe or vulnerable after the incident. It could lead to depression, pessimism, and a decline in interest in once-enjoyable activities. Victims of violence may experience symptoms of anxiety and depression, such as feelings of hopelessness, sadness, and irritability. They may also have trouble in sleeping or eating.

3. **Guilt and self-blame:** Witnessing a crime can lead to feelings of guilt and self-blame, particularly if the individual feels that they could have prevented the incident or failed to help the victim. Many crime victims reflect on the circumstances leading up to the incident and consider whether they could have reacted differently. This may result in guilt feelings and a reluctance to disclose the occurrence or ask for help.

4. **Anger and aggression:** Witnessing a crime can lead to feelings of anger and aggression, particularly if the individual feels that justice has not been served or that the perpetrator has not been held accountable.

5. **Social withdrawal:** Witnessing a crime can lead to social withdrawal and isolation, particularly if the individual feels that others do not understand or cannot relate to their experience. Same is the case for victims, they may also withdraw from social activities and relationships, and may have difficulty trusting others.

6. **Low self-esteem:** Violence can leave victims feeling powerless and helpless, which can impact their self-esteem and confidence.

7. **Physical symptoms:** Witnessing a crime and being exposed to crime can lead to physical symptoms such as chronic pain, headaches, stomachaches, gastrointestinal issues and sleep disturbances.

The victim's capacity for reasoned thought and action may be compromised as a result of the traumatic experience, making it more challenging to absorb any information given to them. Protocols could be forgotten or remembered incorrectly. Moreover, behaviour might not always serve their own interests. For instance, a victim of sexual assault might take a shower right away despite hearing that bathing should be avoided prior to seeing a doctor.

The victim may have conflicting memories of the crime or may have little to no memory of what happened. Performance may be partially or entirely paralysed by a frightening occurrence. Even simple daily tasks can become less interesting or difficult to focus on, much alone strenuous study or job.

Trauma of witnessing a crime often goes undiagnosed

There are several reasons why trauma from witnessing a crime may go undiagnosed. One reason is that many people may not recognize their symptoms as being related to trauma or may be reluctant to seek help due to social

stigma or a fear of being judged. Additionally, some people may not have access to mental health services or may not be able to afford them.

It is important to recognize the signs of trauma and seek help if you or someone you know has witnessed a crime. Symptoms of trauma can include intrusive thoughts or memories of the crime, avoiding reminders of the event, feeling numb or detached, and having difficulty sleeping or concentrating. It is crucial to seek treatment from a mental health professional if you or someone you know is exhibiting these symptoms. There are also many resources available, such as support groups and hotlines, that can provide assistance to those who have witnessed a crime.

Impact of witnessing domestic violence as a child

Witnessing domestic violence as a child can have a significant impact on a person's emotional, psychological, and social development. Children who witness domestic violence may experience a range of negative outcomes, including:

1. **Emotional problems:** Children who witness domestic violence may experience feelings of fear, anxiety, guilt, shame, and sadness. They may also have difficulty controlling their emotions and may struggle with anger management.
2. **Behavioral problems:** Children who witness domestic violence may have behavioral problems, such as aggression, defiance, and disobedience. They may also struggle with academic performance and have difficulty forming healthy relationships.
3. **Long-term mental health problems:** Children who witness domestic violence may be at higher risk for developing mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
4. **Increased risk of substance abuse:** Children who witness domestic violence may be at increased risk of substance abuse, as they may turn to drugs or alcohol as a way to cope with the trauma they have experienced.

Counseling and other therapies that assist children in processing their emotions, developing effective coping strategies, and forming healthy connections may be beneficial for those who have experienced domestic abuse. It is also important to address the root causes of domestic violence and work to prevent it from happening in the first place.

Dealing with the effects of being exposed to crime and witnessing crime

Your mental and emotional health may be significantly impacted by witnessing and being exposed to criminal activity. Here are some strategies for handling the fallout of witnessing or being exposed to criminal activity:

1. **Ask friends and relatives for help:** You can process your feelings and feel less anxious by discussing your experience with a trusted confidante.
2. **Get professional assistance:** Think about getting in touch with a trauma-focused therapist or counsellor who can assist you in processing your emotions and creating coping mechanisms.
3. **Look after yourself:** Make sure to prioritise self-care practises including physical activity, a balanced diet, and adequate rest.
4. **Use relaxation techniques:** Including deep breathing, mindfulness meditation, and yoga can help lower anxiety and stress.
5. **Join an advocacy group:** A sense of community and support can be created through establishing connections with people who have gone through similar circumstances.
6. **Consider filing a police report:** Reporting the incident can make you feel more powerful and may stop the offender from hurting other people in the future.
7. **To feel relaxed, eat healthfully and get enough sleep:** You can feel more emotionally resilient when you're physically fit.
8. **Choose a hobby you enjoy: Play with your animals:** Maintain a hobby schedule. Go on vacation wherever you feel comfortable.

How do kids survive after witnessing these events

Children frequently experience fear, grief, or disorientation after a stressful occurrence. The good news is that children can cope with challenging emotions. These are some techniques you can use to help them temporarily recover from the trauma.

Take their concerns seriously: Your child's worries are real to them, even if they are baseless. It's important to hear what the other person has to say and to respond in an open, sincere, and supportive manner without making fun of them. Employ words appropriate to your age. Be mindful of your child's unique needs. Children's lives were interrupted by the COVID-19 epidemic, for instance, and many of them lamented their "normal"

lives, used to miss friends and relatives, and feared regarding the future. It can be beneficial to discuss stress and check in daily to examine ideas and feelings.

Don't assume anything: instead of telling them that you recognise their anger or fear, let them communicate their sentiments to you. It allows people to be upfront and honest about their feelings rather than trying to live up to your expectations.

What is the truth: Although we adults are aware that news outlets will frequently play the same B-roll of the awful event, your child might believe that each time is a completely different occurrence. Choose something to watch with them that is more appropriate for their needs after informing them that the traumatic incident is over.

Reactions that are common should not be medicalized: Otherwise, your overreaction may aggravate their unpleasant experiences. It's normal for kids to feel horrible following a frightening event, just like it is for adults. But if the feelings persist, consider seeking professional help.

V. CONCLUSION

Depending on the person and the circumstances of the occurrence, witnessing a crime or being exposed to various forms of violence can have varying psychological impacts. But it's well known that these encounters can have a big influence on someone's mental and emotional health.

Not all victims of violence will experience the same psychological repercussions, and some victims may not experience any at all, it is crucial to recognise. But, if you or someone you know has been the victim of violence, it's crucial to get care from a mental health expert who can assist you in addressing any psychological consequences you might be feeling.

In the event that you have seen a crime and are exhibiting psychological symptoms, it is crucial to seek support and therapy. There is no shame in acknowledging your need for help. You can begin by talking to a dependable friend or a religious leader. But if you believe you might require expert assistance, act quickly. In particular, during these trying times, therapists, counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists are all educated to assist.

In order to prevent the witnessing of a crime from going untreated, it is crucial to recognize the symptoms of trauma and get aid. Your emotional and physical well-being will both improve as a result.

Keep in mind that there is no right or wrong method to heal from trauma and that everyone handles trauma in a different way. While you process your emotions and seek support, it's crucial to be kind and gentle with yourself. Your reactions to a distressing incident are typical ones. Despite the fact that it may not feel like it right now, they will progressively fade in the upcoming weeks and months.

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