

Reviews

Victims, crime and society: An introduction (2nd edition)

By Pamela Davies, Peter Francis and Chris Greer

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This impressive book provides a comprehensive introduction and overview of the academic analysis of victims and crime.

In the introduction, the three editors and highly regarded criminologists, Pamela Davies, Peter Francis and Chris Greer, describe:

'This is a book about victims of crime, survivors of abuse, the consequences of social harm, the nature of victimhood and the extent and impact of victimisation. It is a book concerned with the study of victims and victimisation, and is written from a critical perspective that seeks to: challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about the study of victimology; question key concepts and approaches to thinking about victims and survivors; critique ways of understanding the nature and extent of victimisation; and provide an alternative reading of many conventional approaches to responding to victims' needs and experiences'

The book sets about achieving its aims through thirteen chapters, written by leading lights in the field. These chapters start by introducing the fundamental challenges of quantifying and defining victims and victimisation. Crime peaked in 1995, a year in which 40 per cent of adults were the victims of crime, falling to 16 per cent in 2016. Nevertheless, not all victims report

the crimes that are inflicted upon them, some crimes have more profound effects upon those who experience them, and some groups suffer greater victimisation than others. It is this social context that is drawn out throughout the course of this book.

The social construction of victimhood is addressed in chapters exploring historical perspectives and theoretical issues, as well as the problems of media representation of victims and victimisation. These chapters show how the way that victims are understood has shifted in public policy, academia and the media. The contributors draw out the provocative and critical notion of a 'hierarchy of victims'. Through the lens of this analysis, those at the lower end of the hierarchy are perceived to have exposed themselves to crime or even be deserving of this, such as the homeless, drug addicts and sex workers. In contrast, idealised middle class citizens are seen as the model of deserving victims. These chapters chillingly expose how these hierarchies are manifested in media representations and public discourse. The results of this are profound for individuals, who can find their concerns dismissed and be subjected to secondary victimisation through the criminal justice system. Together, these chapters show how victimhood is deeply entangled with wider structures of power and inequality.

Further chapters offer international comparisons, which show the expansion of victims' rights and expectations, enshrined in national and international law. While the greater attention being given to supporting and helping the victims of crime are to be welcomed, these are sometimes

conditional, targeted at the ideal, deserving victim. An unintended consequence of the greater visibility of victimhood is discussed, in particular how this can intensify public feelings of fear and insecurity.

What stands out about the scope of this book is that it dedicates almost half of its content drawing attention to victimisation amongst vulnerable and marginalised groups, including chapters on gender, older people, socio-economic inequality, race and religion and sexuality. Further, as well as showing how victimisation falls disproportionately upon the relatively powerless, the book concludes with a chapter that exposes the victimisation created by the crimes of the powerful, such as serious corporate frauds, safety crimes, crimes against consumers, environmental crime and state violence.

In a world where victims and victimhood carries a political payload, this book is a calm and rational contribution. That is not to say that it is politically neutral or without passion. The editors and various contributors all clearly share a perspective that crime and victimhood reflect and are entangled in social power and inequality. They also all share a commitment to promoting social justice through empirical research.

There is much to learn from this book. For students, academics and practitioners, it is a comprehensive overview and introduction to its subject. Equally importantly, there is much to admire in the commitment to informing compassionate public policy and social justice.

Dr. Jamie Bennett, Deputy Director, HMPPS