

Common Links Between Victims and Offenders

By: Laura M. Sands

It is not uncommon for victims and offenders to share common links. Mostly, this linkage is one of personal acquaintance, family or lifestyle. In the majority of child molestation cases, research shows victims and offenders to be personally acquainted and, in many cases, the offender is an actual family member. In violent crimes against adult men, approximately half of all victims know their offender. In crimes against adult women, as many as seventy percent of victims are personally acquainted with an offender before a crime is committed.

Common links between victims and offenders may exist through familial relationships, peer relationships, work relationships, intimate relationships or casual acquaintances. These linkages also relate to the types of crimes committed. In instances of violent crime, victims and offenders are more frequently acquainted, while in crimes of robbery or vandalism, it is far less common for victims and offenders to know one another beforehand.

In cases between victims and family offenders, there appears to be a trend involving offenders who are older than their victims. These relationships include parents victimizing children, older siblings victimizing younger siblings, or older relatives victimizing younger ones. This trend may also correlate to that of offenders preying upon victims that are perceived to be weak or easy targets.

When considering the connection between these two groups, most automatically focus on a relationship prior to a crime being committed. Through victim offender reconciliation programs, however, the focus on the relationship between the victim and offender after a crime becomes the primary focus. In such programs, convicted criminals and their victims agree to meet to discuss the reasons for the crime. Victim offender reconciliation also allows the offender to apologize for his actions and for the victim to find potential closure as a means of putting the psychological trauma behind him.

The process of a victim becoming an offender is another common link between these two groups. It is not uncommon for an offender to have also been a prior victim of crime. Often these crimes relate to various forms of child abuse and neglect, gang violence or other peer violence, such as bullying. Without the tools to cope with the crimes committed against them, these individuals go on to victimize others.

It is important to note that, while victims and offenders may have common links prior to the committal of a crime, a victim is never to blame for the offender's motives, choices or actions. As is sometimes the case in crimes involving abuse or sexual assault, offenders may attempt to blame the victim and others for certain actions leading up to the crime. The connection between victims and offenders, however, should never be used as an excuse for a crime.