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Australian Institute of Criminology

The Database of Victimisation Experiences

Georgina Fuller

AIC Reports
Technical and
Background Paper **60**

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Foreword

The experience of crime can have far-reaching, and at times devastating, impacts on victims and survivors. This can extend beyond the direct physical and psychological effects of the crime, potentially affecting a person's social, occupational, educational and economic functioning. It is therefore important that researchers and policymakers attempt to understand and address the nature and impact of victimisation to ensure that the full spectrum of needs and experiences of victims/survivors are not overlooked.

Primary barriers to undertaking research with victims/survivors of crime, particularly for those of violent crimes, are accessibility to these individuals, and the need to ensure that their involvement in research does not cause them further harm.

Victims/survivors can be a particularly vulnerable group and being traumatised a second time as a result of reliving their experience can be a very real and serious consequence of participating in research studies. A victim/survivor's vulnerability can also be compounded by factors including their age, gender, cultural and linguistic background, or mental health. To protect these individuals, the Australian Government has strict guidelines that dictate how and when research can be conducted within this population. This is in addition to the ethical requirements set by the National Health and Medical Research Council when conducting

research with human participants. Such guidelines help to ensure that research conducted involving victims/survivors of crime is ethical and reduces the risks to participants. However, they can also make it difficult for researchers to conduct the research needed to better understand the nature and impact of victimisation in Australia.

In 2013, the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) and Victim Services NSW agreed to develop a database on victimisation experiences, using de-identified information collected as part of compensation claims lodged with Victim Services NSW. This process led to the development of the Database of Victimisation Experiences (DoVE). The primary aim of the DoVE is to allow researchers to more fully explore the nature and impact of violent victimisation by analysing de-identified psychological evaluations of victims/survivors of crime. The material recorded in the DoVE contains rich, qualitative information about the victim/survivor's functioning prior to and after the act of violence. This resource allows researchers the opportunity to gauge the nature, and to what extent an experience, of violent crime can impact a victim/survivor, and to an extent, their families and friends.

Adam Tomison
Director, Australian Institute of Criminology

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Use of the term victim/ survivor

The term survivor is sometimes used in place of the word victim. This is common in certain areas of research, particularly in relation to sexual or domestic and family violence. The author acknowledges that the term victim may not reflect the individual's own view of their situation. However,

for the purposes of describing the development of the database, the term victim will be used throughout this report to identify an individual who as experienced violence crime.



Introduction

The victim plays an important role in a criminal offence. In particular, it is often their presence or absence that determines whether a crime has taken place. Australian states and territories use differing criteria in their definitions of what constitutes a victim; however most agree on the following two principles. That a victim is:

- an individual or organisation who has been harmed, either physical or psychologically, by or during the course of a criminal offence; or
- an individual whose property has been stolen, damaged or destroyed (see *Victims of Crime Act 1994 (ACT) s 2A*; *Victim of Crime Act 2001 (SA) part 1 s 4*; *Victims Rights and Support Act 2013 (NSW) part 1 s 3*).

This definition is deliberately broad in so that it encompasses both primary and secondary victims of crime. A secondary victim is an individual who was not directly involved in the crime but who has suffered vicarious trauma as a result. Examples may include family members of a murder victim or customers who were present during a robbery, but who themselves were not robbed or targeted by the offender.

Academics in this area have often stated that victims are overlooked in the study of crime; their role neglected in favour of examinations of the offender and punitive sanctions enacted by the state (Karmen

2004). However, this may not be entirely accurate. While it is true that attention on the study of victims of crime, or victimology, has fluctuated since the 1940s, shifting in response to changes in the social and public perceptions of crime and victimisation (Karmen 2004; O'Connell 2008), certain aspects or types of victimisation have received particular attention. For example, the Australian media has recently given much attention to:

- violence against women;
- the physical and psychological effects of assault ('one punch can kill'); and
- the impact of child sexual abuse.

It is perhaps more accurate to say that the experiences of victims and the study of victimology, particularly in Australia, has been limited in its scope and depth. It is apparent that certain crimes and particular types of victims have received the most attention, while the experiences of others, such as secondary victims or male victims of rape have not been as thoroughly explored (Ellis 2002). Karmen's (2004) review of the literature in the United States identifies more than 25 potentially 'overlooked' types of victims.

The academic and media focus on particular types of victims has limited the understanding of victimisation more generally. While not always the case, most studies have examined the impact of

specific crimes in isolation, for example, victims of sexual assault or of armed robbery. This had led to a 'siloeing' of victimisation experiences, with the impact and nature of victimisation only being considered for each, individual crime type. This is potentially detrimental to the understanding of victimisation as it lacks a holistic perspective. The risk is then that services and legislation, based on research that focuses on a small minority or particular type of victim, will not be able to be broadened to the wider population.

In contrast, over the past 20 years large-scale projects such as the International Crime Victimisation Survey (see van Dijk, van Kesteren & Smit 2007), the Crime Survey for England and Wales (Office for National Statistics 2015) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Crime Victimisation Survey (ABS 2015) have provided useful data on victims across a wide variety of crime types. However, while these studies are excellent sources of information on the volume of victimisation, they are by their nature,

incapable of providing the more detailed information necessary to understand the nature and impact of victimisation.

The Database of Victimisation Experiences (DoVE) has been designed to enable researchers to more closely examine the experiences of victims of violent crime. It is made up of 730 de-identified psychological evaluations of victims of violent crime in New South Wales (NSW). This rich qualitative information was supplied as part of a reciprocal research arrangement between the AIC and the Victim Services NSW.

While the use of qualitative analysis is common in criminology, the creation of a qualitative database is less so. Although the project is only in its early stages it is hoped that as the methodologies are refined it can be expanded to include similar data from other jurisdictions in an effort to build a more comprehensive picture of victimisation in Australia.



Studying victims of crime

Accessing reliable and appropriate samples of victims for analysis is difficult. The three most common methods by which information about victims is gathered are through crime statistics recorded by police, victimisation surveys or victimisation studies. The strengths and weaknesses of each of these approaches are discussed below.

The risk of re-traumatising or 'secondary victimisation' is a significant barrier to in-depth research with victims. The concept of secondary victimisation should not to be confused with the issue of secondary victims though the two terms are often closely related. Secondary victimisation (also referred to as 'second assault' or 'second rape') refers to instances where a victim is further victimised or traumatised through negative experiences during the criminal justice process and/or by support organisations (Campbell & Raja 1999; Campbell et al. 2001). Montada (1994) notes that this is experienced by victims as 'further violation of legitimate rights or entitlements' (Orth 2002: 314). Secondary victimisation can also be used to describe individuals who become traumatised through contact with the primary victim, such as family, friends or support workers. Throughout this report it is these individuals who are referred to as 'secondary victims'.

The likelihood of a victim of crime being re-traumatised by their involvement in the justice system has been the focus of research for a number of years, with a

particular focus on victims of sexual assault (see Campbell & Raja 1999; Koss 2000; Campbell et al. 2001). Orth (2002) studied the impact of participation in criminal proceedings by surveying a sample of 137 victims of violent crime in Germany. Respondents reported what they perceived the impact of their involvement with the criminal justice system to be—measured from very negative to very positive. Other measures included satisfaction with the outcome, severity of the punishment, justice and level of stress. Orth found that victims were at risk of secondary traumatisation through criminal proceedings. In particular, participation had negative impacts of the victim's 'faith in a just world' and trust in the legal system (Orth 2002: 321). Other studies have also highlighted the potentially traumatising nature of interactions with criminal justice and/or support agencies post crime. Of 286 mental health professionals surveyed by Campbell and Raja (1999), 81 percent felt that participation in the legal system was harmful to victims of sexual assault. Further, 84 percent believed that the responses of community professionals could also contribute to secondary victimisation. Ways in which this occurred included undergoing a forensic medical exam and harmful counselling practices (Campbell & Raja 1999).

Herman (2003) outlines a number of ways court processes can impact on the victim; in particular, the negative psychological effect of having to recount their

experiences in an open court, sometimes in front of the perpetrator. Further, the adversarial nature of the trial may expose the victim to attacks on their credibility, leaving them feeling traumatised and invalidated (Herman 2003). Despite many criminal justice agencies and court systems making important changes to their processes in an effort to better support victims of crime (see Outtrim 1999; McGregor, Renshaw & Andrevski 2003 for some examples), re-traumatisation and secondary victimisation remain a key concern. Currently there are no studies available which examine the likelihood of secondary victimisation through participation in research. However, it is still an important concern, particularly if the research requires the participant to recount their experiences. The National Statement of Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), hereafter referred to as the National Statement (2007), has clear directives on the harm to participants posed by research. The following harms possibly associated with conducting research are listed in the National Statement (2007):

- ‘psychological harms: including feelings of worthlessness, distress, guilt, anger or fear-related, for example, the disclosure of sensitive or embarrassing information...’;
- ‘social harms: including damage to social networks or relationships with others...social stigmatisation...’ (National Statement 2007: 16).

It is not difficult to see how research that involves victims could potentially harm the participant. This risk is likely to increase the more the participant is required to discuss and relive their experiences. To minimise the harm to participants, human research ethics committees often require strict guidelines around accessing, interviewing/surveying victims and analysing and reporting on the data, and this may limit the scope of potential research. As a result, victim research can be very difficult to conduct and researchers therefore look for alternative ways to collect information associated with this population. The most common ways are through police recorded crime statistics, victimisation surveys or self-report interviews.

Recorded crime statistics

In Australia and overseas, crime statistics recorded by police provide one of the most important and reliable sources of information regarding crime. In Australia, two types of police statistics are available, those

collected by each state and territory police force, or the national statistics collected by the ABS in its publication *Recorded crime, victims, Australia*. The data in these types of publications provide valuable insights into the volume of crime in Australia and associated temporal patterns. The ABS also disaggregates the information by certain types of crime as well as providing further data on the age and demographics of victims and the basic circumstances of the crime such as where it occurred and weapon used (ABS 2012). Researchers have used police recorded crime statistics for a wide variety of purposes including examining fluctuations in crime and associated characteristics (Bricknell 2008; AIC 2014), local area analysis (Donnelly & Snowball 2006) and to determine the impact of changes to policing methods, policy or crime prevention (Chilvers, Korbelnikoff & Ramsay 2002).

The key criticism of police crime statistics is that they reflect only the volume of reported crime. Not all crime is reported to police, this varies depending on the crime. Traditionally, property crime has had higher rates of reporting than violent crime, particularly sexual assault (AIC 2013). Reasons given for not reporting an incident to police include a belief that the incident was minor/trivial, a lack of confidence in police and a decision to deal with it personally (ABS 2012). Police crime statistics do not include information pertaining to those victims who do not report their crime; these may form a sub-population who could be qualitatively and quantitatively different to those who do. Further, recorded crime statistics are constrained by what is considered, at that time, to be an offence. MacDonald (2002) included victimless crimes (such as illegal drug use) as well as those not reported to police in the ‘dark figure’ of crime that is missed in official recorded statistics. However, police statistics remain a valuable data source. As noted above, they are regularly used for a wide variety of reasons and as long as there are no significant fluctuations in the rate of reporting across time or location, police statistics will reflect any changes in actual offending (Weatherburn 2011). Yet, for researchers seeking to gain a greater understanding of victimisation beyond volume and basic characteristics, recorded crime statistics may provide limited assistance.

Crime victimisation surveys

Crime victimisation surveys, such as the ABS’ Crime Victimisation Survey (CVS) or the International Crime

Victimisation Survey (ICVS) attempt to capture information related to individuals who do not report their crime to police (as well as those that have reported). This helps to better record the prevalence of a criminal offence in the community. Methods vary across surveys, however the ICVS interviews between 1,000 and 2,000 individuals drawn from national or urban populations using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) and face-to-face interviewing (van Kesteren, van Dijk & Mayhew 2013). Standard questions focus on personal and household experiences of crime, as well as addenda added each year. Addenda topics have examined issues such as the support received by victims, fear of crime, and police response interviewing (van Kesteren, van Dijk & Mayhew 2013). The ABS survey is similar in its method, though on a smaller national scale. Compared with the ABS publication, *Recorded crime—victims, Australia*, the CVS estimates numbers of individuals who did not report. Further, it surveys why they did not report as well as other characteristics such as their employment and relationship to offender (ABS 2013).

Weatherburn (2011) identifies a number of weaknesses with crime victimisation surveys, specifically, that they:

- are limited in their ability to collect information on 'victimless' crimes such as illegal drug use or rare crimes such as homicide; and
- they can compare poorly to police recorded crime statistics in terms of the detail available about the incident of crime (Weatherburn 2011).

Further, like police statistics, crime victimisation surveys are epidemiological in nature. They reduce victimisation to quantitative information that allows researchers to examine the trends and patterns. The inclusion of individuals who do not report to police may give researchers a better indication of the prevalence of victimisation both within Australia and internationally. However, like police recorded crime statistics, victimisation surveys are limited in their ability to provide detailed information on the impact and experiences of victims of crime.

Victimisation studies

Given the limitations of both police statistics and crime victimisation surveys, the most common method for collecting detailed information about the experiences of

victims is via direct contact. Victimisation studies use a variety of methods including semi-structured interviews, self-report questionnaires, or the application of psychometric tests. The benefit of these approaches is that they provide the detail currently missing from recorded crime statistics and victimisation surveys. For example, Field, Zander and Hall (2013) recently used semi-structured interviews to examine the views of 11 victims of crime regarding forgiveness. Participants were recruited via ads in local newspapers throughout Western Australia and the results were analysed using qualitative coding methods. They found that victims of crime viewed forgiveness and the ability to forgive as closely connected to their own concepts of psychological wellbeing. This contrasted with models presented in other literature that focused on the interpersonal and social outcomes of forgiveness (Field, Zander and Hall 2013). Field, Zander and Hall's research is an example of how these types of studies have the ability to more closely describe the true nature and impact of crime on victims.

However, this approach has limits, in particular, the trade-off between detail and generalisation. Field, Zander and Hall's (2013) study interviewed only 11 participants, which limits the ability to generalise findings to the wider population of victims. Further, studies that explore victimisation in this depth are not often comparable. For example, the differences in sample, methodologies and types of analysis used will mean that two studies looking at the experiences of sexual assault victims cannot be compared. Finally, re-traumatisation is a key concern with this type of research, as it often requires the victim to recount or remember in detail the experience of the crime. As stated previously, efforts to mitigate this risk often result in limitations on the way victims can be sampled, questioned and their data analysed.

Overall, researchers have traditionally used a variety of methods to study victimisation both within Australia and internationally. Police-recorded crime statistics and victimisation surveys are valuable sources of information on the volume and trends in crime but lack the detail needed to fully explore the impact of violence on the victim. In contrast, studies of victimisation can obtain that level of detail, but often have a narrow focus, which limits their ability to be applied to the wider population.

Methodology

The DoVE is the result of a research partnership between the AIC and Victim Services NSW. Victim Services NSW is part of the NSW Justice Department and aims to provide information and support to victims of crime. The department's services include free counselling, financial support, specialist support groups and the Victim Access Line. It also advises the state's Attorney General and the NSW Parliament on issues related to victims and victimisation.

In mid-2013, the AIC initiated discussions with the then NSW Commissioner of Victims Rights about the possibility of using qualitative data held by Victim Services NSW, to explore the impact of crime on victims. The AIC proposed using data from psychological evaluations of victims of crime written by authorised report writers (ARWs). The ARWs were psychologists who were contracted by Victim Services NSW to provide an independent perspective on, and an assessment of, the impact of the crime and the victim's current situation. The ARW could not be a member of the victim's regular treatment team. These reports were collected as part of victim's applications to the NSW state government compensation scheme. This scheme was mandated as part of the *Victims Support and Rehabilitation Act (VSRA) 1996 (NSW)*. This Act has since been repealed and replaced by the *Victims Rights and Support Act 2013 (NSW)*, which outlines

the victim's compensation scheme currently operating in NSW.

Under the previous Act, compensation claims could be made by primary or secondary victims, immediate family members of victims, or any other person who had a genuine interest in the victim's welfare (*VSRA 1996 (NSW) s 25*). The claim had to be lodged with the Director of Victim Services NSW within two years of the act of violence. A compensation assessor then considered claims and may have required other supporting documentation such as medical or psychological examinations to make their determination. The ARW reports were submitted to this process as an independent perspective on the impact of the crime on the victim.

During this initial discussion, the following four categories of violent crime were identified by the two agencies as areas of mutual interest:

- physical assault (including grievous bodily harm, serious assault and common assault);
- sexual assault (including child victims and historical sexual assault cases);
- domestic violence (including family and intimate partner violence); and,
- robbery (including armed and unarmed robbery).

Within these four crime types, particular areas of interest were also identified. These were:

- repeat victimisation;
- secondary victimisation;
- the impact of exposure to victimisation on quality of life;
- timeliness in service delivery; and
- commonalities and differences in individuals' responses to crime victimisation.

Rather than focus on discrete projects, it was decided that the AIC would create a qualitative database using ARW reports. This would provide the flexibility necessary to thoroughly explore the crimes and themes identified above.

Until 2013, awarding compensation to victims of crime was governed by the *Victim Support and Rehabilitation Act 1996 (NSW)*. This Act has been amended a number of times and as a result Victim Services NSW requested that a sample of ARW reports be drawn from between 2003 and 2012 as reports obtained within this period were considered the most comparable. It was therefore agreed that 400 reports would be drawn from between 2005 and 2006 and a subsequent 400 reports from between 2010 and 2011. These time periods were selected based on advice from Victim Services NSW and their knowledge of the data. The method of sampling is discussed below.

Ethical considerations

This research had a number of ethical considerations that needed addressing before it could proceed. The three most important considerations were the confidentiality of subjects' information, accessing the reports without the consent of the individual and adhering to the NSW *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002* (no 71) (hereafter referred to as the Privacy Act (2002)).

Confidentiality

To avoid identifying individual victims, confidentiality of the data was strictly controlled and all identifying information removed from the reports prior to inclusion in the database. Deidentification took place in two stages.

An AIC researcher carried out stage one at the Victim Services NSW premises in Parramatta. After being scanned from hard copy and converted to a Microsoft Word document, all ARW reports were initially redacted. During this stage, information that could identify the victim, offender, their family or associated non-professional individuals (eg witnesses) was removed including:

- name;
- date of birth;
- address/telephone number;
- educational institutions attended; and
- places of employment.

It was important that this process did not ultimately limit the researcher's ability to distinguish between individuals involved in the incident, so names were replaced with repeating letter sequences. These sequences were standardised and were also used to retain information related to the redacted person's relationship to the subject of the report. For example, the subject of the report was always identified by the sequence XXXX. If the report referred to XXXX's mother or father, the mother's name would have been redacted as MMMM and the father's to FFFF. A full list of sequences is included in Appendix A. This approach did not affect the confidentiality of individuals, as it was not possible to identify XXXX on relationship alone. Where more than one person shared an acronym (for instance, in the case of multiple offenders), they were distinguished by a number at the end of the sequence (ie OOOO1, OOOO2...OOOO^N).

Stage two involved further redaction after the de-identified reports had been moved to a restricted access folder on the AIC server. During this stage, information pertaining to professionals including police officers, counsellors and medical professionals was also removed. This included:

- the professional's name;
- business affiliation/name of business;
- ARW number; and
- date of report.

Maintaining confidentiality is not just limited to the reports themselves. Any publication that uses DoVE data will adhere to guidelines around confidentiality. Distinguishing information about the crime itself will

also be removed from any specific case studies that are to be used in publications to illustrate key points about victimisation. This will limit the likelihood of identification through association.

Consent

Individuals who were the subject of ARW reports included in the DoVE were not contacted to provide their consent. The **National Statement (2007)** has clear guidelines around the conditions necessary for a waiver of consent to be granted:

- that the involvement in the research carries no more than low risk...to participants (the National Statement section 2.3.6a);
- the benefits from the research justify any risks of harm associated with not seeking consent (2.3.6b);
- it is impractical to obtain consent (for example, due to the quantity, age or accessibility of records) (2.3.6c);
- there is sufficient protection of their privacy (2.3.6e); and
- that there is an adequate plan to protect the confidentiality of the data (2.3.6f).

Broadly, these guidelines required the AIC to demonstrate that the DoVE posed negligible risk to individuals who were the subject of the ARW reports and that it was impractical to obtain consent.

The AIC contended that the potential risk and associated harm to the individual that could have been caused through identification has been controlled, as described above, through strict confidentiality guidelines and redaction processes. It is therefore highly unlikely that an individual would be identified either through information contained within the database or upon publication. Further, the method undertaken here does not require victims to recount or remember their experiences of crime. As a result the serious risk of re-traumatisation is negated.

Two factors determined the impracticality of gaining consent from each person who was the subject of an ARW report and included in the database. The final sample was to comprise 800 reports and it would have been impossible to individually contact

the subject of each report within a reasonable timeframe. In addition, the decision to sample from cases that were nearly seven years old also presented a similar challenge, given that it was likely that some individual contact details would have changed and not been updated; particularly if their involvement with Victim Services NSW had ceased.

Privacy

As Victim Services NSW originally collected the information to evaluate compensation claims, this research also had to adhere to the guidelines specified in the Privacy Act (2002). The Act states that the data can be used for research as long as individuals cannot be identified from the information provided or in subsequent publications. For example, health information can be used for a secondary purpose other than the primary purpose it was collected for if:

‘[T]he use of the information for the secondary purpose is reasonably necessary for research, or the compilation or analysis of statistics, in the public interest and;

(i) either:

(A) that purpose cannot be served by the use of information that does not identify the individual or from which the individual's identity cannot reasonably be ascertained and it is impracticable for the organisation to seek the consent of the individual for the use, or

(B) reasonable steps are taken to de-identify the information, and

(ii) if the information could reasonably be expected to identify individuals, the information is not published in a generally available publication, and

(iii) the use of the information is in accordance with guidelines, if any, issued by the Privacy Commissioner for the purposes of this paragraph...’ (Schedule 1.10f)

This research satisfies criteria B. Steps have been taken to redact all identifying information making it highly unlikely that an individual who is the subject of a report would be identified from within the database or upon publication.

Victim Services NSW and the AIC Human Research Ethics Committee were satisfied that the research met ethical standards and the project was approved in August 2013 (protocol number P0207).

The data

Until early 2013, individuals seeking compensation from Victim Services NSW regarding violent crime victimisation had to be evaluated by an independent ARW. The information gathered would be used to determine the victim's level of psychological harm that could be attributable to the act of violence. Some ARWs also used the opportunity to suggest treatment or support options they felt to be appropriate in these instances. The reports contain comprehensive information pertaining to the crime as well as the victim's reaction and experiences during and after the offence. Though the level of detail varies depending on the ARW, reports also contain information on:

- victim demographics;
- victim's and family's medical/psychiatric history;
- victim's school/employment history;
- psychological consequences of victimisation experience;
- victim's scores on psychometric tests (eg The Beck Depression Inventory, The Clinician Administered PTSD Scale, Global Assessment of Functioning); and the
- ARW's professional opinion regarding level of psychological harm and suggestions for treatment/services.

Victim Services NSW estimates that it had received between 2,000 and 3,000 ARW and counselling reports each year since 1996. However, due to changes in legislation, reports received between 2004 and 2013, specifically 2005, 2006, 2010 and 2011, were determined to be the most comparable.

It is important to note that this is a purposive, non-probability sample drawn from individuals who sought compensation from Victim Services NSW over two defined time periods and thus cannot be considered as able to be generalised to the wider population of victims of violent crime.

Sampling

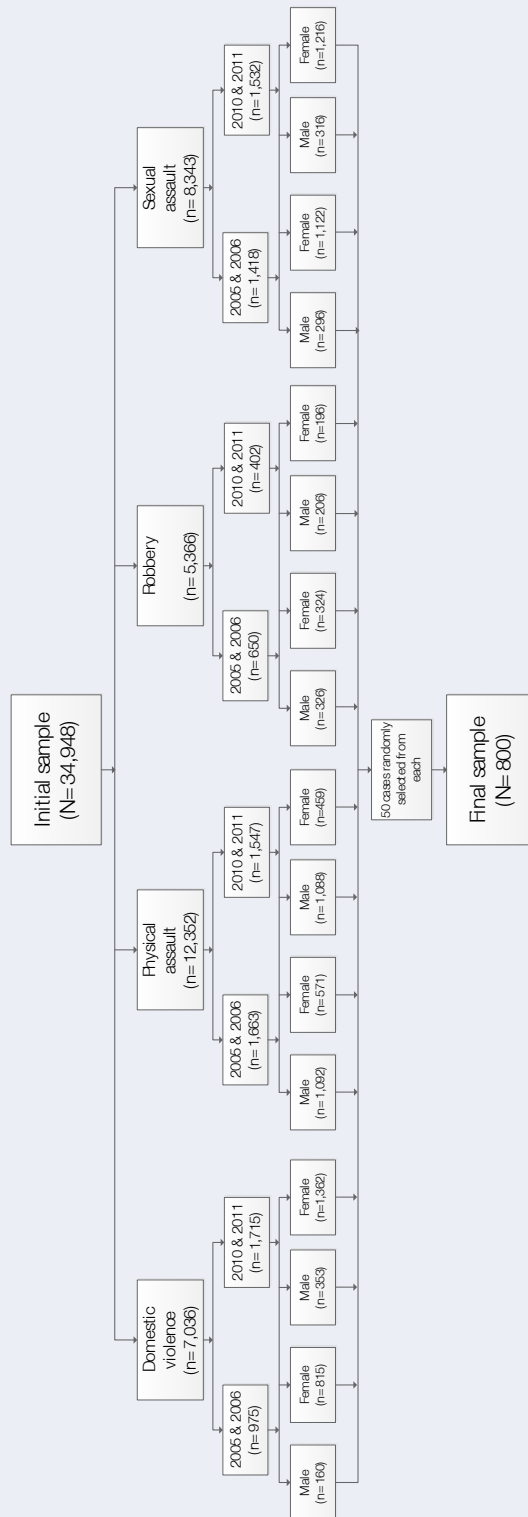
Victim Services NSW received a total of 34,948 ARW reports from September 1997 until March 2013. The AIC was supplied with a de-identified index of all ARW reports to undertake the sampling process.

The aim was to collect approximately 200 cases from each of the four identified crime categories—physical assault, sexual assault, domestic violence, and armed robbery. However, a truly random sample was considered inappropriate for this type of research as it may have led to the exclusion of less common types of victims. For example, it was expected that for a crime like sexual assault most victims would be women. It was therefore important to ensure that where the information was available, the experiences of male victims were also included in this sample. In light of this, the decision was to select cases to include through a process of random stratification.

The full sample was stratified into three levels: crime, date of lodgement and gender of the subject of the report (Figure 1). As the focus of the database was to collect information pertaining to the four crime types of interest, the first strata separated out the cases detailing the experiences of victims of domestic violence, physical assault, robbery and sexual assault. The decision to further stratify by date was made in response to the Victim Services NSW request to sample reports received from 2005, 2006, 2010 and 2011. This was to ensure comparability between reports. Finally, it was decided to include equal numbers of male and female victims. This ensures the sample will adequately capture the experiences of men, women and children, especially in crimes where victims of a particular gender may dominate.

From within these three levels of stratification, cases pertaining to 800 victims were randomly selected. Each case was assigned a number using the random number generator command in Excel. The 50 cases within each group were then selected by including those with the 25 highest and the 25 lowest numbers. The final list of 800 was sent to Victim Services NSW so that they could request the hard copy case files for data collection.

Figure 1 Stratified sampling methodology



Data collection

Data collection took place on site at Victim Services NSW, Parramatta, in October 2013 and February 2014. An initial 619 cases were obtained over six-days in October 2013, with a final 119 collected over three days in February 2014. A total of 62 cases could not be included due to problems encountered during data collection. Some of the cases could not be found, the files presented did not contain an ARW report, or the compensation claim was currently being processed by Victim Services NSW and was therefore not available to the researcher.

The reports were stored as part of hard copy case files for each individual victim. Initially, each report was scanned and converted from a pdf to a Word file using Adobe X Pro software. In some instances this affected the quality of the report but only to the extent that a few words in affected documents were

illegible. All reports were usable following the conversion.

Information identifying the subject and offender was redacted by an AIC researcher onsite at the Victim Services NSW premises under the supervision of a member of the Victim Services NSW staff. Reports were then transferred to a secure location on the AIC server where they were further redacted as required by the AIC ethics committee and as described above.

The final sample

The final sample included a total of 730 cases:

- 182 victims of domestic violence (25%);
- 176 victims of physical assault (24%);
- 179 victims of sexual assault (24%); and
- 193 victims of robbery (26%).

Table 1 Gender, age and type of victim – DoVE population sample

	Domestic violence	Physical assault	Sexual assault	Robbery
Gender				
Male	79	105	91	100
Female	103	71	88	93
Type of victim				
Primary	146	151	145	174
Secondary	36	25	34	19
Age				
Less than 4 years	3	0	0	0
4 to 10 years	27	3	13	2
10 to 14 years	25	7	6	2
14 to 17 years	12	10	17	0
18 to 19 years	14	5	10	5
20 to 30 years	22	36	32	37
30 to 40 years	32	40	34	37
40 to 50 years	25	30	28	32
50 to 60 years	7	25	17	37
Greater than 60 years	9	10	5	26
Not specified	6	10	17	15
Total	182	176	179	193

The database

The database was constructed using NVivo 10 software. This software allows researchers to organise, categorise, and analyse qualitative information so that they can identify themes and characteristics. This made it well suited for the task of categorising 730 reports.

A framework was designed to classify each report based on the type of victim and other information represented in the report. This framework reflects the interactions between the subject, the offender, the situation and the various systems that may have involved the subject/offender. A total of 72 items are included in the framework and were selected based on AIC/Victim Services NSW discussions on data that would provide flexibility in forming and addressing research questions still to be developed (Table 2). This included items that captured characteristics reflecting a victim's pre-crime functioning to give meaning to the analysis of impact.

To avoid the framework becoming too large and unmanageable, a number of 'flags' were inserted. These indicate when the report might contain information that would be of interest to future researchers, but which may be too difficult to classify in the earlier stages of development and use. The flags are basic yes/no indicators used when a particular characteristic was either present or absent. For example, if a subject reported that their mother suffered from depression, then the family history of mental illness flag would be classified as yes. These flags are also shown in Table 2.

The framework does not categorise the data; rather it creates a list of variables that researchers can subsequently use for the basis of their analysis. After each case was classified, the next step was to code them using a series of 'nodes'. Nodes reflect the themes that researchers may be interested in exploring and were also deliberately kept broad. The structure of the nodes loosely follows the layout of the reports. A list of base nodes is presented in Table 3.

Table 2 Framework matrix used to classify reports

	Victim	Offender	Situation	Systems
Victim	Type of victim Gender Gender of victim (if different) Age Age of victim (if different) Age at crime Occupation Marital status Number of children Structure of family of origin Pre-existing mental illness flag Pre-existing AOD issues flag Pre-existing physical disability flag Pre-existing intellectual disability flag Pre-existing medical illness flag Prior history of victimisation flag Family history of mental illness flag Family history of AOD issues flag Family history of physical disability flag Family history of intellectual disability flag Family history of medical illness flag Family history of victimisation (not related to current claim) CALD background Indigenous status Country of birth	Relationship Number of victims	Relationship with victim (if a secondary claim) Injury sustained Medical attention required	Educational attainment History of foster care/OOHC flag Type of foster care/OOHC placement Number of foster care/OOHC placements Prior criminal history flag Prior incarceration flag Prior contact with government services flag (not victim services) flag Prior contract with victim support services flag Prior compensation claim flag Reported crime to the police flag
	Offender	Gender of offender Age of offender Age of offender at crime Occupation Mental illness flag Physical disability flag Intellectual disability flag Medical illness flag History of victimisation flag AOD abuse issues flag Number of offenders Indigenous status CALD background	Weapon Weapon use Level of violence	Prior criminal history flag Prior incarceration flag Prior contract with government services flag Prior contract with victim support services flag Prior history of foster care/OOHC flag
		Situation	Category of crime seeking compensation for Crime year start Crime year end Duration of victimisation Location Witnesses flag Number of witnesses Presence of security measures	Police involved Outcome
			Systems	Multiple support organisations flag

Table 3 Base node of the DoVE				
Macro nodes		Micro nodes		
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
ARW	Observations			
	Opinion			
	Recommendations			
Sources				
Pre-incident	Compensation			
	Criminal			
	Demographics			
	Education			
	Employment			
	Family			
	General functioning			
	Medical			
	Psychological	Intellectual		
		Mental health		
	Referral			
	Relationship			
	Social			
	Stressors			
	Substance	Alcohol		
		Drugs		
	Victimisation			
	Description			
	Impact	Functioning		
		Physical		
		Psychological	Psychometric	Anxiety
				Depression
				Functioning
				Other



The value of the DoVE

The DoVE provides an opportunity for researchers to more closely examine areas of victimisation that have been neglected. It has been created with two broad aims. To allow researchers to examine:

- the direct and indirect experiences of victims of specific violent crimes; and
- the social, psychological and developmental factors that may impact on the severity of the consequences experienced post-victimisation.

This approach to the study of victimisation differs from those discussed above in a number of ways. First, the DoVE allows researchers to explore victimisation without direct contact with victims. The original purpose of ARW reports was to allow the NSW Victim Compensation Tribunal to determine the level of psychological and associated harm experienced by the victim that could be attributed to their experience of crime. These reports contain a wealth of information including demography, developmental, medical, educational, employment and relationship history, experiences with drugs and alcohol, as well as descriptions of prior victimisation, significant life events or stressors. This scope and detail of information is not often accessible through traditional methods such as victimisation surveys or studies because of ethical concerns, such as the risk of re-traumatisation.

The DoVE also has the potential to allow researchers to describe a broader range of victimisation experiences. The inclusion of four crime types as well as primary and secondary victims means that the information contained within the database provides the opportunity to identify and compare victimisation experiences across types of crime. While victimisation surveys and police statistics collect information on a wide variety of offences, once again, it is the level of detail present in the DoVE data that sets it apart from these two methods.

Using this type of data does have its limitations, particularly the lack of ability to generalise to the broader victim population. The information is drawn only from individuals who have sought compensation from Victim Services NSW. This is critical because there may be key differences in the types of individuals who seek compensation (or help from government services more broadly) and those who do not. As a result, the patterns and characteristics identified through research using this sample may not apply to all victims of violent crime. Though attempts have been made to make the sample as applicable as possible through random stratification, it is still only representative of individuals who have sought help and engaged with Victim Services NSW.

The nature of the ARW reports has implications for the type of information they contain. Variability in the type and level of detail recorded in the reports is an issue. While Victim Services NSW supplies report writers with guidelines on how to structure their reports and what information to include, it was not always collected consistently or to the standard required. This is because ARW report writers relied predominantly on semi-structured interviews that allowed victims to provide in-depth information about aspects of their experience and history that they felt were important. Therefore some aspects of the victimisation may be explored in more detail compared with others. This lack of consistency also means that victims may have omitted information about their experience that they did not think was relevant or did not verbalise at the time. This may result in differential detail between victims' accounts, thus impacting on understanding the actual experience of victimisation described and, consequently, the researcher's ability to identify strong and cohesive patterns throughout the sample.

A database that records the experiences of victims in a structured way will help researchers to understand the victim's role in crime as well as highlight their specific needs in terms of treatment and support. This type of information will be particularly useful to policymakers in both the criminal justice domains as well as those government and non-government organisations that seek to help victims recover and cope with the impact of violent victimisation. Although the DoVE currently contains information from one state, the aim is to incorporate similar data from other jurisdictions, as the methodology is refined. Ultimately, the aim of the DoVE is to produce policy-relevant research around the nature and impact of victimisation and the subsequent needs of victims. In doing so it can make meaningful contributions and improvements for individuals who experience violent victimisation in Australia.



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Appendix A Redaction letter sequences

Table A1 Letter sequences used during redaction

Stage of redaction	Sequence	Relationship
Stage One	XXXX	Subject of report
	OOOO	Offender
	MMMM	Mother
	FFFF	Father
	HHHH/XHXH	Husband/Ex-husband
	WWI/XWIXWI	Wife/Ex-wife
	GFGF/XGFXGF	Girlfriend/Ex-girlfriend
	BFBF/XBFXBF	Boyfriend/Ex-boyfriend
	SMSM	Stepmother/Parent's female partner
	SFSF	Stepfather/Parent's male partner
	BBBB	Brother
	HBHB	Half-brother
	SBSB	Stepbrother
	SISI	Sister
	HSIHSI	Half-sister
	SSISSI	Stepsister
	DDDD	Daughter
	SDSD	Stepdaughter
	SSSS	Son
	S.SSS	Stepson

Table A1 Letter sequences used during redaction cont.

Stage of redaction	Sequence	Relationship
Stage One	F.MMM	Foster mother
	F.FFF	Foster father
	F.BBB	Foster brother
	F.SISI	Foster sister
	GMGM	Grandmother
	GDGD	Grandad
	RRRR	Related, other
	VVV	Non-related, other
	WWW	Workplace
	EEEE	Educational institution
	PPPP	Address
	SUBURB	Suburb name
	TTTT	Telephone
Stage Two	ARWARW	Authorised report writer
	PSYCH	Psychologist/psychiatrist
	COUNS	Counsellor
	VSNSW	Victim Services NSW Director/Addressee
	LAW	Lawyer/solicitor/legal officer
	POLICE	Police officer
	MEDICAL	Medical (not psychological) professional
	REHAB	Rehabilitation provider (including WorkCover/ComCare)

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