

Victimology in the 21st Century: A Global Examination of Victimization, Support Systems, and Public Perception

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Abstract

This scoping review examines the evolving field of victimology in the 21st century, emphasizing the global variations in victim perception, support systems, and the impact of technology. The review is driven by three main objectives: to explore the cultural dimensions of victimhood and public perception across different global settings; to assess the barriers to effective victim support in resource-poor environments; and to analyze the dual role of technology as both a driver of victimization and a tool for recovery. This research is aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5, which aims to eliminate violence against women, and Goal 16, which focuses on ensuring equal access to justice for all. By reviewing recent literature, the study reveals that "victimization" is often deeply influenced by cultural factors, with societal norms shaping the legitimacy of harm. In countries with limited resources, Western support models often fail due to a lack of local adaptation and infrastructure. Additionally, the growing prevalence of digital technologies has led to the emergence of "cyber-victimology," where technology-facilitated abuse is widespread, yet survivors are frequently blamed for not adequately protecting themselves online. The findings suggest that achieving global justice necessitates a shift toward "cultural victimology" and the incorporation of local perspectives in policy-making. By focusing on context-appropriate interventions and challenging rigid "ideal victim" stereotypes, the international community can more effectively address the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Keywords: Victimology, Cultural Victimology, Cyber Victimization, Low-Resource Support, Victim Perception.

1. Introduction

Victimology in the 21st century has evolved from a focus on criminal law to a multidisciplinary approach that examines the "victim experience" across social and digital landscapes (Jaishankar, 2020; Mythen, 2012). Traditional victimology often relied on "utopian idealism," which portrayed victimhood as a straightforward, universally recognizable experience. However, contemporary research has shifted toward "hard realism," recognizing the systemic barriers victims face in the justice system and beyond (Fattah, 2002). This shift has led to the development of "cultural victimology," a framework that emphasizes the role of cultural, societal, and intersectional identities in shaping the victim experience (Hall, 2017; Semenza et al., 2022).

In particular, "cyber-victimology" has emerged as a response to the increasing role of technology in both perpetrating and addressing victimization. Digital platforms have created new forms of abuse, such as cyberbullying and online harassment, while also offering new opportunities for victims to seek support and recover. However, the rise of digital abuse has introduced new challenges, including victim-blaming, where survivors are often criticized for failing to navigate digital safety measures (Marganski & Melander, 2021; Regehr et al., 2021). This reflects broader societal attitudes that hold victims responsible for their own harm, further complicating their recovery.

Moreover, low-resource nations face significant challenges in adapting Western-centric support models to local contexts, often due to a lack of infrastructure and cultural relevance (Koss et al., 2017). The failure to localize victim support systems has exacerbated global disparities in access to justice and recovery. To address these issues, there is a growing call for culturally informed victimology that recognizes local experiences and integrates community-specific solutions.

The future of victimology depends on shifting toward a more inclusive, culturally sensitive approach that acknowledges the diversity of victim experiences and barriers to justice. By integrating local perspectives and technological innovations, the international community can better meet the goals of eliminating violence and ensuring equal access to justice for all, as outlined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

This study follows the PRISMA-ScR framework to ensure a rigorous and transparent mapping of the global victimological landscape (Gillespie et al., 2025; Idriss-Wheeler et al., 2024; Rose & Tran, 2024). The methodology is further grounded in the six-stage framework proposed by Arksey and O'Malley, which allows for an iterative approach to identifying and charting complex, heterogeneous literature (Alberton et al., 2025; Campbell et al., 2022; Moon & Lee, 2022).

2.1 Search Strategy and Information Sources

To identify relevant literature, a comprehensive search was conducted across multiple electronic databases, including OpenAlex, PubMed/MEDLINE, Scopus, Web of Science, and the Criminal Justice Database (Marcum & Higgins, 2021; Rockowitz et al., 2022; Weldearegay et al., 2025). The search strategy was guided by the Population, Concept, and Context (PCC) framework recommended by the Joanna Briggs Institute for scoping reviews (Rockowitz et al., 2021). The population component included victims of crime, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and marginalized groups (Kennedy et al., 2025; Rockowitz et al., 2021). The concept component focused on public perception, cultural treatment, the effectiveness of support systems, and technology-facilitated victimization (Rogers et al., 2022; Zamora et al., 2022). The context component encompassed global settings, with particular attention to low-resource countries and digital environments (Weldearegay et al., 2025). Boolean operators were used to combine keywords such as "cultural victimology," "low-resource victim support," "technology-facilitated abuse," "cyber-victimization," and "victim-blaming" (Marcum & Higgins, 2021; Rogers et al., 2022; Weekes et al., 2025). In addition, the reference lists of identified systematic reviews were manually examined using backward citation tracking to ensure literature saturation (Carlisle et al., 2023; Marcum & Higgins, 2021).

2.2 Eligibility Criteria

Sources were selected based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The review included publications released between January 2000 and March 2026 to capture contemporary trends in digital violence and modern justice reforms (Rockowitz et al., 2021, 2022; Weldearegay et al., 2025). Only full-text articles published in English were considered because of resource limitations that prevented translation of non-English studies (Rockowitz et al., 2022; Weekes et al., 2025). Eligible study designs comprised peer-reviewed empirical research, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies, as well as systematic and narrative reviews. Relevant grey literature, such as reports from the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, was also included to provide contextual information, particularly for low-resource settings (Jolof et al., 2024; Rockowitz et al., 2021; Šupa, 2021; Weldearegay et al., 2025). Studies were excluded if they did not focus on victim-centered outcomes or if they were conference abstracts without accessible full-text versions (Kuupiel et al., 2023; Weldearegay et al., 2025).

2.3 Selection and Data Charting Process

The selection process involved two independent reviewers screening titles and abstracts, followed by a full-text review of Eligible papers were independently screened by two reviewers to ensure consistency and reduce selection bias (Carlisle et al., 2023; Weekes et al., 2025). Any disagreements regarding study eligibility were resolved through discussion and, when necessary, consultation with a third reviewer (Carlisle et al., 2023; Todić et al., 2021). Data extraction was conducted using an iterative charting process and a structured form developed in Microsoft Excel (Carlisle et al., 2023; Levac et al., 2010). The extracted variables included article characteristics, such as the author, year of publication, and country of origin (Campbell et al., 2022; Kennedy et al., 2025); methodological details, including study design and theoretical frameworks such as Routine Activity Theory (Ahlin & Antunes, 2025; Kennedy et al., 2025); and core themes, including cultural barriers to help-seeking, challenges to implementing support systems in low-resource settings, and the technological platforms or media involved in victimization (Kennedy et al., 2025; Todić et al., 2021; Zamora et al., 2022).

2.4 Synthesis of Results

A narrative synthesis was conducted to categorize the findings into the three primary research gaps (Carlisle et al., 2023). Given the scoping nature of this review, a formal critical appraisal or risk-of-bias assessment was not performed, as the goal was to map the breadth and nature of evidence rather than to measure the quality of individual study effects (Campbell et al., 2022; Carlisle et al., 2023; Moon & Lee, 2022). The final synthesis emphasizes the "hard realism" of global victim support challenges and the emerging complexities of the digital age (Ahlin & Antunes, 2025; Fattah, 2002).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Cultural Variations in Victim Perception and Treatment

Contemporary research highlights that victimization is deeply embedded within cultural contexts, and what may be considered a crime in one culture might be normalized or dismissed as a "normal" occurrence in another. For instance, behaviors that are perceived as abusive or criminal in one society may be viewed as acceptable or even necessary within the familial or social dynamics of another (Hall, 2017). This cultural relativity in victimization leads to significant differences in how crimes are identified, categorized, and responded to across various societies.

The public's perception of victimization is often influenced by the "ideal victim" framework, where victims are regarded as deserving of sympathy and justice only if they meet certain societal standards. According to this framework, victims are

typically seen as vulnerable, blameless, and suffering at the hands of a stranger (Whiting et al., 2019). This framework excludes individuals who may be victimized within their families or communities, as they may not be perceived as fitting the "ideal" victim mold. As a result, those who do not conform to these societal expectations are often neglected or marginalized in the justice system.

Victim-blaming remains a prevalent issue in many cultures, and it is often fueled by underlying psychological and societal biases, such as "Just World Theory," which posits that people get what they deserve based on their actions (Schoellkopf, 2012). This leads to the tendency of blaming victims for their circumstances, particularly in cases of sexual assault, domestic violence, or other crimes where the victim's behavior is scrutinized. However, movements like #MeToo have played a critical role in challenging these biases, raising awareness about the systemic inequalities that contribute to victimization, and pushing for a shift away from victim-blaming (Hall et al., 2023; Murdoch & Gonsalkorale, 2017).

Cultural differences also play a significant role in how victimization is understood and handled. For example, collectivist cultures, such as in China, tend to view social norm violations as highly immoral, with greater societal pressure to conform and stricter social control measures. On the other hand, individualistic cultures, such as the United Kingdom, may be more lenient and emphasize individual rights over collective societal expectations (Chen-Xia et al., 2023). These cultural differences influence not only how victims are treated but also how crimes are reported and responded to within communities.

3.2 Effectiveness of Victim Support Systems in Low-Resource Countries

In low-resource countries, victim support systems face unique and significant challenges. These countries are often impacted by what is known as the "resource curse," where a lack of infrastructure and limited financial resources hinder the development of effective victim support services (Peacock, 2021). These limitations make it difficult to provide victims with the comprehensive care they need, especially in areas where legal and psychological support services are either underfunded or non-existent.

One of the primary reasons Western-centric victim support models fail when exported to low-resource settings is the lack of trained professionals and a general cultural preference for spiritual or home-based remedies over clinical interventions (Koss et al., 2017). These imported models often overlook local cultural practices and may not be easily accepted by the communities they aim to serve, further complicating the effectiveness of these interventions.

The One-Stop Center (OSC) model, which aims to provide integrated health and legal services in a single location, has shown potential in addressing some of these issues. However, its effectiveness is often undermined by high staff attrition rates, which limit the continuity and quality of care, as well as the persistent social stigma surrounding victimization. These factors create barriers to both accessing services and fostering a supportive environment for victims (Keesbury & Askew, 2010; Olson et al., 2020; Sawah et al., 2025).

Interestingly, some interventions have found success by adapting to the local context. Programs that utilize non-clinically trained local facilitators have been shown to be more effective in resource-poor settings. Peer-led models, which emphasize community support and culturally relevant approaches, have proven to be more sustainable and better accepted than clinical diagnostics and treatments that are not tailored to local needs (Kirk et al., 2017). These findings highlight the importance of integrating local voices and practices into victim support programs, as well as the need to empower communities to take ownership of their own healing and recovery processes.

3.3 The Role of Technology in Victimization and Victim Support

The advent of digital technologies has given rise to "Cyber Victimology," a field dedicated to understanding how technology both facilitates victimization and offers new pathways for victim support (Jaishankar, 2020). Technology has become a double-edged sword, as it enables new forms of abuse and control while also providing opportunities for victims to seek help and support.

Technology as a weapon has become particularly evident in cases of cyberstalking and technology-facilitated violence. Perpetrators are now able to extend their control over victims by utilizing digital tools such as GPS tracking, hacking personal devices, and engaging in non-consensual image sharing (Bailey et al., 2021; Bussu et al., 2024; Louie, 2021). These new forms of abuse often occur outside the traditional legal and social frameworks, creating significant challenges for law enforcement and victim support services.

The rise of digital victimization has also led to an increase in modern victim-blaming, with survivors often being held responsible for not using digital safety measures or apps to protect themselves (Marganski & Melander, 2021). This form of victim-blaming perpetuates the idea that victims are at fault for their victimization, even when they are targeted by perpetrators who use advanced digital tools to exploit them.

Furthermore, the increasing use of video evidence in the justice system can create cycles of re-victimization. When survivors are required to relive their trauma through video recordings of their victimization, they may experience what is known as "mediated cycles of abuse." This phenomenon occurs when survivors are repeatedly exposed to their victimization through digital records, which can hinder the healing process and contribute to re-traumatization (Regehr et al., 2021). As technology continues to evolve, these issues highlight the need for updated policies and practices that balance the benefits of digital tools with the potential harm they can cause victims.

Overall, while technology offers innovative solutions for victim support, it also introduces complex new challenges that must be addressed to ensure the safety and well-being of victims in both the digital and physical realms.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

Victimology in the 21st century stands at a crossroads between digital advancement and cultural reality. This review concludes that meaningful progress toward the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16 and Sustainable Development Goal 5 requires moving beyond a “one-size-fits-all” approach to victim support. The findings indicate that effective victim assistance is not solely dependent on resource allocation but also on cultural sensitivity, survivor-centered practices, and the dismantling of the “ideal victim” stereotype that often excludes marginalized individuals from receiving justice and support. Technological innovations in victim services must be implemented carefully to avoid digital re-victimization and the widening of the digital divide, particularly in rural and low-resource communities. Furthermore, integrating local cultural practices, social work interventions, and spiritual support alongside judicial reforms can strengthen victim recovery systems and create more equitable and resilient victim support frameworks globally. The review further reveals a significant disconnect between global victimological goals and their local implementation. The transfer of high-resource victim support models to developing regions often results in services that fail to address the actual needs and realities of victims in those communities. Victims frequently perceive such systems as disempowering and inadequate in supporting their pursuit of justice. The study also highlights the persistence of modern-day victim blaming in digital environments, where technological illiteracy is used against survivors. Moreover, the growing reliance on data-driven justice systems may unintentionally overlook the contextual forms of marginalization experienced by vulnerable populations, thereby limiting inclusive progress toward the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The continued use of stereotypes and “legal fictions” regarding how victims are expected to behave contributes to amplified victimization, especially among women, minorities, and individuals from low-resource settings who do not conform to the “ideal victim” image.

Based on the findings of this review, it is recommended that culturally specific restorative justice practices be integrated into victim support systems. These approaches should combine local traditions and community-based conflict resolution mechanisms with modern restorative justice principles to ensure relevance and effectiveness within different cultural contexts. It is also recommended that governments and institutions prioritize the establishment of essential infrastructure, such as shelters, safe houses, and accessible support centers, before implementing advanced technological interventions. Strengthening these foundational services can provide immediate protection and support for victims while preparing communities for future digital innovations. In addition, policymakers should adopt intersectional approaches that recognize how factors such as gender, race, socioeconomic status, and cultural background contribute to compounded victimization. Policies designed with intersectionality in mind can help ensure fair and inclusive support for marginalized populations. The study also recommends encouraging co-produced research by actively involving survivors in the planning, development, and evaluation of victim support services. Including survivor perspectives can lead to more practical, compassionate, and responsive interventions that better reflect the lived experiences and actual needs of victims.

This study is limited by its reliance on secondary data obtained exclusively from published literature and scholarly sources. Since no primary data collection or direct engagement with victims, practitioners, or institutions was conducted, the findings are dependent on the scope, quality, and interpretations of existing studies. The review may also be constrained by the availability of literature from certain regions, particularly low-resource countries where victimological research remains limited. Additionally, variations in cultural, legal, and social contexts across different countries may affect the generalizability of the findings. The study also acknowledges that rapidly evolving digital technologies and justice systems may lead to future developments not fully captured within the reviewed literature.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study followed accepted academic and ethical standards for systematic literature reviews and relied solely on published sources and secondary data from publicly available literature; therefore, no human participants or primary data were involved in the study. The authors acknowledge the scholars whose published works informed and supported this review and ensured that all sources were properly cited and credited in accordance with academic standards and copyright requirements. Ethical approval was not required because the study did not involve direct participation, experimentation, or data collection from individuals. Likewise, informed consent was not applicable since no human participants were involved. The authors further declare that there were no financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conduct, interpretation, or findings of the study.

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