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Positive Victimology – An innovation or “more of the same”?

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This article discusses the theoretical and practical development of a new perspective called Positive Victimology. A review of constructing worlds such as Positive Criminology and Positive Psychology is examined in their importance and contribution towards founding the preliminary yet innovative discipline of Positive Victimology. However since this domain is an enhancement or improvement of already existent terminology there is a need to investigate the true theoretical and practical need for a new field while weighing the advantages and shortcomings of producing new territory.

Keywords: positive victimology, terminology, discipline.

In recent years a sub field named “Positive Criminology” has been presented as an innovative concept that utilizes an inclusive perspective in criminology (Ronel, Elisha, 2011). This perspective focuses on integrating and unifying forces and influences that are experienced as positive by target individuals and groups. Positive criminology is a continuation of Positive Psychology, the study of positive experiences (Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). However, it adds crime desistance, reduction or prevention as a necessary condition. Positive criminology inspires to expand the understanding beyond the usual focus of criminology on separating, excluding, and disintegrating forces and processes that lead individuals and groups to embrace deviant and criminal lifestyles and activities (Braithwaite, 1989; Ronel, Frid, Timor, 2011). Our main goal is to further broaden these

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concepts, which mainly focus on offenders. These concepts shall be adapted and applied to victimology, thus suggesting *Positive Victimology*. Victimology in its purest form, guided by Mendelssohn's theory (1963), examines individual and group victims, as well as a victim's social behavior and interaction. Our primary focus is to examine the possibility and necessity of defining positive victimology as a victimology subfield, similarly to the formation of positive criminology within the wider criminology.

What is Positive Victimology?

The main goal of positive criminology is to highlight and enhance the study and adaptation of „positive components“ (e.g., acceptance, compassion, encouragement, faith, forgiveness, gratitude, humor, positive modeling, spirituality) with individuals and groups participating in prevention, rehabilitation, and recovery programs. It was recurrently found that this focus might, in turn, lead some individuals to develop similar positive qualities and thereby increase their chances of turning their lives around, for the benefit of themselves as well as society (Duckworth, Steen, Seligman, 2005; Elisha, Idisis, Ronel, 2011, 2012; Fredrickson, 2001; Martin, Stermac, 2010; Ronel, 2006; Ward, Mann, Gannon, 2007). Overall, positive criminology seeks to strengthen the unifying force between offenders and members of the normative community rather than emphasize, or privilege, the separating forces of law-enforcement (e.g., imprisonment, exclusion, shaming) (Braithwaite, Ahmed, Braithwaite, 2006).

The corner stone of positive criminology as founded on a socially deviant population begs the question of whether this perspective can be utilized and embraced with victims as well. In other words, what is “positive victimology” and is there a need for this new field? Will this idea of using positively experienced, integrative forces as been proven to be of help to a “non conventional” population can be as productive when assembled on victims? If so, what needs to be modified and what are the limitations of this concept?

Utilizing the definition of positive criminology suggested by Ronel and Elisha (2011), positive victimology is defined as a perspective within victimology that is comprised of at least three components. The first one being integration directed to individuals that experienced past victimization. The integration may be divided into three levels: a social inclusion process, a self-integration experience and a spiritual unification challenge. The second component

suggests that the practicum should be perceived as a positive experience by the target population. Having said that, the process of therapy and recovery might reveal unavoidable pain, as this is common in these types of proceedings. However, the positive experience might overcome this pain. The third and final component is the intent to achieve closure concerning primary victimization by the individuals involved as well as abolish secondary victimization, i.e. the subjective consequences of the primary victimization (Ronel, 2009).

Research conducted from a similar point of view confirms the hypothesis that traumatic events and negative experiences can lead to positive changes, despite the inevitable pain involved. Furthermore this type of change is correlated with consistent psychological adaptation (Ai, Park, 2005), and at times may lead to a positive spiritual transformation (Balk, 1999; Marrone, 1999). Optimistic, religious and spiritual characteristics can also influence and assist the rehabilitation and healing process. These are perceived as a crutch for psychological adjustment after a negative event. The basic assumption in positive psychology is that positive experiences are not secondary to negative ones (Duckworth, Steen, Seligman, 2005). This assumption is also reflected in the fields of positive criminology and victimology.

It can be stated, that while positive criminology places focus on teaching and practicing positive unifying components, distancing one from deviant and criminal behavior, positive victimology does the same for the victim, while aspiring to minimize the impact the offence might have. In addition, positive victimology focuses on empowering the victims as well as assisting him or her grow on a personal and social level despite being hurt as a result of a negative traumatic event. Becoming a victim insinuates a process of social, self and spiritual detachment (Ronel, 2009), therefore healing expresses the victim's need for a complete positive experience of unification and social connection. As a completion to positive psychology, which focuses on personal psychological process, positive criminology and victimology place an emphasis on the social aspect, including the reaction of society to self, and expanding the opportunities for personal and interpersonal growth despite the traumatic or hurtful event. In addition, they address law-enforcement processes with the underlying principles of positively experienced, integrating and healing processes. Although law enforcement might raise conflicts between offenders, victims and societies, positive criminology and victimology share a call for a new practice that will be guided by the above principles, as will be portrayed shortly.

Positive Victimology in practice

Though positive criminology was focused on a delinquent population hoping to prevent recidivism, it is important to understand the methods and approaches used, which have been proven to be successful. In the field of positive victimology, these methods may be adapted and improved when applied on victims. In our humble opinion, by creating a platform to the field of positive victimology, we are in fact giving a voice to the victim, while being attentive to his or her special needs in this process of reconnection. In other words, in order to build a perspective that will reflect the voice of the victims (Ben-David, 2000), we must check the unifying components that were presented in regards to the criminal population.

Positive victimology addresses an element of prevention. Despite the fact the subject of prevention is already established within the world of criminology (e.g., Hawkins, Arthur, Olson, 1997), prevention of victimization or further victimization is in need of a special focus, that of the victim. This practice may be a continuation to the communitarian approaches discussed in many prevention models (e.g., Etzioni, 1988, 1997; Hawkins, Catalano, 1992), only with a different level of sensitivity to the current or potential needs of the victims.

When it comes to victims' rehabilitation, a holistic, spiritual approach exemplifies positive victimology, as it highlights the possibility for growth beyond the pain (Ronel, 2009; Hart, Shapiro, 2002). Such an approach may include self-help components, similar to those used successfully in the recovery of other populations (Brende, 1993, 1995), in which social acceptance, understanding and support are key features. Since victimization many times creates a process of social alienation (e.g., Levy, Ben-David, 2008; van Dijk, 2006), the role of social acceptance and inclusion is central to positive victimology.

In the field of law-enforcement, positive victimology should take on a victim-oriented, integrating practice. Unfortunately, law-enforcement systems in their current approach, as seen worldwide, tend to cause secondary victimization (Hulsmann, 2006). Positive victimology raises the need for a different approach by, for example, expanding the concept of „due process“, traditionally directed towards offenders only. Positive victimology aspires to include victims under “due process” during law-enforcement proceedings (Luria, 2012). Furthermore it should include victim-oriented practices by law-enforcement that have the ability to enhance positive experiences for survivors (Aharoni-Goldenberg, Wilchek-Aviad, 2008; Bitton, 2008).

Positive victimology supports the ideas inspiring to promote a therapeutic jurisprudence model, and those suggesting rehabilitation for all the involved parties (Dancig-Rosenberg, 2008). Finally, the principles of positive criminology in law-enforcement are to a great degree exemplified by the practice of restorative justice, that attempts to bring together the interests of all parties involved (Shachaf-Friedman, Timor, 2008; Timor, 2008).

Restorative justice raises another related component of recovery, according to positive victimology, that is, reconciliation and forgiveness (McCullough, 2000). Although it is challenging for victims to forgive their offenders (Maltby, Macaskill, Day, 2001), the study of forgiveness repeatedly presents the value for victims as they succeed, under appropriate conditions, to experience some degree of forgiveness (Flanigan, 1992; Kaminer, Stein, Mbanga, Zungu-Dirwayi, 2001). Forgiveness, by definition, is an inclusive practice. It might be the cornerstone of recovery programs designated for survivors of victimization (Freedman, Enright, 1996).

Early victimological literature indicated several categories of victims. Most of these typologies named weak individuals or groups as potential victims with woman, the young, the old and the mentally retarded being primary examples (Drapkin, Viano, 1974). However, Ben-David (2000) questions how much these observations do represent an objective? Positive victimology attempts to provide an answer by changing the way we look at victims: rather than emphasizing their weakness and risks, we attempt to appreciate their strengths and opportunities for growth. The event or process of victimization, which is usually a turning point in an individual's life, is viewed as a challenging process aspiring to end with a positive transformation that accepts the victimization, while gradually moves forward.

Conclusion

Following our presentation of positive victimology – still one might wonder-Is there a real need for defining positive victimology as a new perspective in victimology? One of the main arguments is seemingly lack of innovation. Is there a substantial need for a new term, for a discipline that already exists within the broad discipline of victimology? Another counterclaim is the question of whether we are distancing ourselves from the victim and true meaning of victimization by setting the focus on positive

objectives, while to some degree minimizing the negative experience and the impact it leaves behind?! There is still no definite solution to this potential criticism. However, we see a potential advantage in the association of existing components of a defined field to create a new whole that is bigger than the sum of its already known parts. Consequently, we assume that the definition of positive victimology, though encompasses existing theories, models and practices, places a stronger emphasis on the underlying perspective defined here as "positive", and thus creates a new whole with some unique characteristics. Future research is required to assert the accuracy and practice of these suggested assumptions.

To summarize, we briefly examined the primary steps taken to develop a new perspective extracted from victimology and positive criminology. Positive victimology is not a completely new discipline but a new perspective on successful healing components and theories borrowed from other academic worlds. It has emphasized the importance of providing a platform for victims to express their special, still positive, needs and possibilities. Positive victimology reaches out to the survivors of traumatic painful behavior and desires to assist them while using positive components as a main road in their journey towards rehabilitation and healing. We have no doubt that this pioneer perspective inspired to grow is in need of much more enforcement and practice to define it in a more accurate and territorial aspect. Its true authentic success could only be examined with time.

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Pozitivna viktimologija – Inovacija ili nešto staro?

Članak razmatra teorijski i praktični razvoj novog pravca pod nazivom Pozitivna viktimologija. Analizira se način konstruisanja svetova kakav nude pozitivna kriminologija i pozitivna psihologija, a ove dve discipline razmatraju se pre svega kroz njihov značaj i doprinos osnivanju pozitivne viktimologije kao inovativne discipline u začetku. Ipak, kako je domen pozitivne viktimologije neka vrsta unapređenja već postojećih koncepata, potrebno je istražiti istinsku teoretsku i praktičnu potrebu za otvaranjem novog polja istraživanja, a istovremeno i proceniti koje su prednosti i mane kreiranja jedne potpuno nove sfere.

Ključne reči: pozitivna viktimologija, terminologija, disciplina.

Forensic victimology is an essential component of crime scene analysis (see Chapter 6: Crime Scene Investigation in Sexual Assaults). Information gathered from a thorough victimology has the potential to affect every stage of an investigation, from crime reconstruction to establishing offender motivation. The goals of forensic victimology include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Assist in understanding elements of the crime.

Many victims today prefer not to define themselves as victims because of the image of weakness and helplessness that implies. For that reason, the preferred term has become survivor, a word that implies strength. Most states in the United States have enacted a set of legal rights for crime victims, often referred to as a Bill of Rights. 2012. Positive victimology: An innovation or "more of the same"™. N Ronel, TY Toren. Temida 15 (2), 171-180, 2012.