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Crime Victims' Decisions to Call the Police: Past Research and New Directions

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Abstract

Over the past 50 years, researchers in the United States and abroad have debated the inherent inequities within justice systems that contribute to the underreporting of crime to the police. Our review summarizes existing knowledge about victim reporting and outlines new directions in theory and empirical research that situate this work within a broader perspective on victim help-seeking. We begin with a short review of the historical development of research on victim reporting and its implications for research and social policy. We then review and critique major explanations of victims' reporting behavior and outline a new integrated multilevel framework. This model draws on the broader help-seeking literature to study police notification and other forms of victim help-seeking as interrelated systems that respond to social-contextual factors and feedback effects. We conclude by outlining the core empirical implications of this multilevel theoretical framework and illuminating the most significant data and research needs.

INTRODUCTION

Crimes are often substantially underrepresented in official data sources, such as the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) in the United States and their equivalents in other nations (Aebi 2010, Biderman & Reiss 1967). Understanding the nature of this dark figure of crime is central to not only improving the validity and reliability of crime statistics but also enhancing knowledge about how people react to victimization and the ways in which the harms associated with crime can be minimized. Indeed, victims' decisions to not call the police may fundamentally shape our understanding of the distribution of crimes, limit the protective and emotional support received by victims, undercut the deterrence capacity of the criminal justice system, and hamper scientific evaluation of policies directed at improving public safety (Hindelang & Gottfredson 1976, Skogan 1984). For these reasons, victims have been rightly described as the gatekeeper of the criminal justice system (Gottfredson & Gottfredson 1988).

Victim crime reporting has been recognized as an important topic of scientific inquiry, but the extant theory and research are limited in several ways. Although the study of victim reporting has roots in economic, psychological, and sociological research on human behavior, few studies have addressed the issue from an integrated theoretical perspective. For the many decades since the implementation of victimization surveys, the research literature has given primacy to situational explanations of victim reporting decisions that draw research attention to the severity of crime itself (Skogan 1984). Many fewer studies have been conducted to examine cognitive, affective, and normative mechanisms in the decisions (Greenberg & Ruback 1992). There are even fewer studies linking contextual factors to the incident-level data on victim reporting (Baumer 2002, Goudriaan et al. 2004), which represents a significant research gap. Finally, most research focuses solely on whether or not victims notify the police, neglecting alternative responses to crime (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005), and there has been a lack of research on the long-term outcomes associated with such responses (e.g., Hickman & Simpson 2003, Xie & Lynch 2017). This limited knowledge unnecessarily severs the connection between victims' prior experience with the police or other helping resources (family, friends, or victim service agencies) and subsequent reporting decisions that general coping theory suggests are key aspects of the victim help-seeking process (Rogler & Cortes 1993, Wills & DePaulo 1991).

Our review summarizes several dimensions of existing knowledge about victim crime reporting to the police and outlines new directions in theory and empirical research that situate this work within a broader perspective on victim help-seeking. The section titled *Victim Reporting: A Brief History* provides a review of the historical development of research on victim reporting and its implications for criminal justice research and social policy. The section titled *Prevailing Theories of Victim Reporting* presents a review and critique of major explanations of victims' reporting behavior, and the section titled *A Multilevel, Contextualized Help-Seeking Model* outlines a new integrated multilevel framework for studying police notification and other forms of victim help-seeking that can guide future theory, research, and practice. In contrast to conventional approaches that consider only the criminal justice system in examining victims' actions in response to crime, our approach draws on the broader help-seeking literature to understand victim decision-making. Finally, in the section titled *Empirical Implications, Data Infrastructure, and Future Research*, we outline the core empirical implications of our multilevel theoretical framework and identify the most significant data and research needs.

VICTIM REPORTING: A BRIEF HISTORY

Prior to the introduction of victim survey techniques, official statistics kept by justice agencies (e.g., police, courts, and corrections) and statistics of crime and delinquency derived from offender

self-reports were the main social indicators of crime (Davis et al. 1997, Meier & Miethe 1993). Although most criminologists have acknowledged that police records are insufficient for measuring crimes, very little systematic research was done on the matter until the 1970s, when the confluence of two developments, one social and the other scientific, opened the way for research on victim reporting.

The Victims' Movement

In the late 1960s and 1970s, the victims' movement, along with the women's movement and the growth of feminist activism, began to call attention to crime victims and the poor coverage in official statistics of certain types of crimes, such as sexual offenses and domestic violence (Young & Stein 2004). As the public became sensitized to the traumatic impacts of crimes, early exploratory studies in victimology were replaced by a growing number of studies conducted to elucidate issues such as fear of crime, the effects of victimization, and victim needs (Fattah 1992). Early writers identified selected demographic, social structural, attitudinal, and situational factors associated with victims' decisions to notify the police (e.g., Dukes & Mattley 1977, Fishman 1979). Although informative, these studies were primitive in the sense that they were either not strongly theory-based or used small convenience samples. Only after the implementation of large-scale victim surveys in the United States and abroad have more systematic investigations of victims' responses to crimes become more feasible.

Victimization Surveys

Victimization surveys have shaped the research on victim reporting in profound ways. The surveys—the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) in the United States, the British Crime Survey [BCS; now the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)], the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS), the European Crime and Safety Survey (EU ICS), and victimization surveys in many developing countries, such as Chile and Mexico, just to name a few—have provided a concrete basis for the assertion that crime activities are generally underrepresented in police sources because of low reporting rates (see, e.g., Biderman & Reiss 1967, Hindelang & Gottfredson 1976). More importantly, the surveys have revealed a complicated pattern of victim reporting. The findings of several national surveys reviewed by Skogan (1984) showed that crime reporting rates varied considerably across time, space, and crime type. For example, property crimes were reported at higher rates than violent crimes; the reporting rates for burglary increased almost every year from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s in the United States; and the Netherlands had a much higher reporting rate for burglary than most other countries.

Similar patterns can be seen in the contemporary installments of the national and international victimization surveys as well (e.g., Hart & Rennison 2003, Morgan & Kena 2017, Van Dijk et al. 2007). Although temporal and spatial patterns in victim crime reporting are scarcely documented, recent studies based on US data showed that the reporting rates of crime had changed meaningfully over time, which could be a function of social-ecological and technological changes during the past few decades (Bachman & Paternoster 1993, Baumer et al. 2003, Baumer & Lauritsen 2010). The estimation of subnational state and local reporting rates is more difficult because many national surveys (including the NCVS) have only limited numbers of sample cases at subnational levels (Langton et al. 2017, Xie 2014). Meanwhile, more specialized surveys with larger samples (see Smith et al. 1999) are only able to cover a narrow range of areas.

Encouragingly, victimization surveys are increasingly being designed, expanded, and restructured to improve the measurement of crimes at national and subnational levels worldwide (e.g.,

Aebi & Linde 2014). A case in point is the NCVS, which is currently being redesigned to capture previously unmeasured (or not well measured) crimes and to have its sample size increased in order to generate direct subnational estimates for 22 states and large cities within them to represent 80% of the US population (Langton et al. 2017). This will greatly expand research capacity suited to comparative research on victim reporting in the United States.

Beyond Victimization Surveys

Although most studies on victim reporting have relied on victim surveys, an important related body of research, including behavioral intention studies and experimental studies of social influence on victim decision-making, has applied a much wider range of methods such as field-laboratory experiments, vignette research designs, police field experiments, and mixed research designs that add to, and sometimes challenge, the findings of statistical surveys (see, e.g., Greenberg & Ruback 1992, Hickman & Simpson 2003). These studies have played an important role in shaping the theoretical cornerstones of current thinking on victim reporting, as we discuss below.

PREVAILING THEORIES OF VICTIM REPORTING

Research on victim reporting behavior has evolved along several theoretical lines. The most common theoretical framework focuses on the situational characteristics of crimes and factors associated with crime seriousness (e.g., Skogan 1984). Other perspectives have emphasized attitudes and social-psychological factors in shaping victims' decisions to report to the police (e.g., Greenberg & Ruback 1992). Finally, some frameworks suggest that the broader social, political, and economic structures in which victims are situated are important for reporting decisions as well (e.g., Black 1976).

Situational Explanations of Victim Reporting and Incident-Based Rational Choice Models

The primary line of research on victim reporting owes much to the work of Sellin & Wolfgang (1964), who developed an index to rank crimes by their perceived seriousness. Although the term crime seriousness has yet to receive a precise definition, the judgments of it have become indispensable in criminal justice practice and research, including the victim reporting literature (Greenberg & Ruback 1992, Skogan 1984). In an early but very influential publication specifying the relationship between crime seriousness and victim reporting, Gottfredson & Hindelang (1979) restated the fact that victims suffer varying degrees of monetary loss, physical injury, emotional distress, and other negative outcomes. They posited that victim decisions to notify the police are primarily determined by variation in the degree of negative consequences that victims experience rather than by variation in more-distant social factors such as the victims' income, education, and residential location. They tested this assertion using data from the National Crime Survey (NCS; the predecessor of the NCVS) from 1974 to 1976. Using the Sellin-Wolfgang scores for each personal crime incident detected in the survey, they found that victim reporting to the police was largely a function of the measured seriousness or harm associated with crime incidents.

Subsequent to Gottfredson & Hindelang's (1979) research, the seriousness or gravity of incidents measured by degree of bodily injury, economic loss, emotional damage, potential for harm, and perceived wrongfulness has emerged in many studies as the strongest correlate of victim reporting (see, e.g., Bachman 1993, Copes et al. 2001, Gartner & Macmillan 1995, Skogan 1984). Many studies incorporated the concept of rationality to explain this empirical pattern (Gottfredson & Gottfredson 1988, Skogan 1984). From this perspective, victim reporting is characterized as

an optimization decision-making process in which victims make rational decisions based on the perceived benefits of reporting (e.g., self-protection, protection for others, property recovery, victim compensation, and retribution of justice) and the anticipated costs of doing so (e.g., risks of retaliation, fear of embarrassment, and time and resources required for participating in legal processes). Skogan (1984, p. 20) best expressed this line of reasoning by noting that “research on citizen crime reporting suggests that a ‘cost-benefit’ metaphor could summarize much of what we have learned about it to date.” Because this framing focuses on victims’ direct experience with crimes, it is an incident-centered, rational choice framework.

The rational choice approach to victim crime reporting has been criticized on multiple grounds but most notably for not giving adequate attention to the roles of emotional factors, normative conditions, and the potential impact of support networks and social environment (e.g., Greenberg & Ruback 1992). Additionally, Gottfredson & Gottfredson (1988) have noted that a simplistic rational choice model of reporting behavior neglects how victims may not always be capable of fully evaluating the costs and benefits of their decisions or have sufficient information about alternatives to police notification. Other researchers, as our review shows next, moved beyond thinking of victim crime reporting decisions as merely rational choices by developing arguments for how attitudinal, social-psychological, normative, and social factors may be influential. Some of these developments resemble the research on offender decision-making models that draw on behavioral economics. We do not review studies that deal with offenders but refer interested readers to Pogarsky et al.’s (2018) review of offender decision-making models.

Attitudes, Perceptions, and Victim Crime Reporting

Attitudinal studies form another active area of research on victim reporting to the police. The issues addressed include a rich body of research on perceptions of gender roles and feminist attitudes (e.g., Jensen & Karpos 1993, Orcutt & Faison 1988, Skelton & Burkhart 1980). The research generally supports an association between higher levels of the acceptance of traditional gender roles and rape myths and higher levels of victim blaming (see Grubb & Turner 2012, Suarez & Gadalla 2010), which has been shown to discourage reporting (e.g., Frese et al. 2004, Temkin & Krahe 2008). In contrast, the relationship between victim reporting and other attitudinal elements, such as citizen opinions regarding conformity, individualism, and government responsibility, is much less clear (Goudriaan et al. 2004).

An important area of inquiry about the links between victim attitudes and reporting behaviors concerns perceptions of police legitimacy and more general attitudes about the police (Anderson 1999, Carr et al. 2007, Tyler 2003). Overall, we know much more about the formation of these attitudes than we do about their impact on the reporting behavior of victims. Past studies have found that race and age are the strongest predictors of attitudes toward the police, most likely through differential contact with police and neighborhood or group effects (see reviews by Brown & Benedict 2002, Decker 1981). Scholars have long contended that younger persons and nonwhites, in particular, are more likely to be dissatisfied with the police and to distrust criminal justice authorities in general and that this may translate into lower levels of reporting to and cooperation with the police (e.g., Carr et al. 2007, Pres. Comm. Law Enforc. Adm. Justice 1967, Sunshine & Tyler 2003). Although this is a plausible hypothesis, the empirical research has produced discordant results. There is some research that supports these linkages (e.g., Bennett & Wiegand 1994, Bradford 2014, MacDonald 2001, Reisig & Lloyd 2009, Tankebe 2013), but other studies indicated that victim reporting or support for tougher law enforcement and criminal justice solutions to crime can be high even among those who hold negative perceptions of the police (e.g., Carr et al. 2007, Khondaker et al. 2017).

The available research suggests some possible explanations for the mixed findings. First, social science studies have found a tendency for attitudes to be imperfect predictors of specific behaviors (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein 1980). The stated willingness or intention of individuals to report crimes captured in some studies (e.g., Sunshine & Tyler 2003) may differ from the actual reporting behavior of victims captured in other studies (e.g., Slocum 2018, Xie et al. 2006), and such different outcome measures may explain some of the disparate results. Further, the discrepant results may be due to poor measurement and the need for fuller, and more consistent, measures of attitudes. The literature indicates that public attitudes toward the police are best understood as multidimensional in nature, encompassing elements of one's satisfaction with police services and more specific views of procedural justice, police efficacy, agency performance, officer characteristics, and other features of police practice (e.g., Reisig & Lloyd 2009). Some of these dimensions of police perception may be more relevant to victim reporting decisions than others, which is not often recognized in the literature. In addition, whether attitudes toward the police influence reporting may depend on the nature of crimes. Garofalo (1977) showed that crime reporting in the NCS increased when the rating of police grew more favorable but only for crime with low seriousness scores. Finally, some of the variation in the impact of attitudes about the police on reporting may be due to national and local contextual differences in policing. Variation in police organizational structures such as the difference between centralized and decentralized policing may influence the reputation of the police and the size of the impact of different attitudes on victim reporting decisions, depending on whether the attitudes reflect national-level perceptions of the police or more localized views (Bayley 1990, Goudriaan et al. 2004). Meanwhile, the sample of countries and the sample of jurisdictions within countries are likely to matter as well. In countries like the United States, where the public tends to view the police in relatively favorable terms (Brown & Benedict 2002), there may be insufficient variation to detect meaningful effects. The range of data variation is likely to be larger in countries where there has been a tradition of public distrust of the police (Torrente et al. 2017). In short, these differences across studies in the outcome examined, definitions of measures, causal mechanism assumed, study population, and sample variation are all sources of variation that may impact study results.

Psychological and Social Influences on Victim Reporting

From a social-psychological perspective, it is important to understand how individuals adjust to crisis situations by looking at their social support networks (for a review of social-psychological studies on coping with victimizations, see Wortman 1983; also see Janoff-Bulman & Frieze 1983). Adopting this view, Ruback et al. (1984) and Greenberg & Ruback (1992) proposed a three-stage victim decision-making model: (a) labeling the event a crime, (b) determining the seriousness of the crime, and (c) deciding on a course of action or no action. They proposed that at each stage victims are influenced by their motivational state, which is affected by emotional stress and sense of loss following the victimization and by the advice of others who influence victims by cueing them with prescribed behavioral scripts, giving them informal advice, providing normative information, and offering them socioemotional support or nonsupport (Ruback et al. 1984). The authors used a variety of methods such as interviews, archival analyses, and experiments to show that victims often discuss their victimization with others and that their subsequent decisions are influenced by the information or advice received (for similar findings, see Mason & Benson 1996, Orchowski & Gidycz 2012).

Ruback and colleagues' work significantly expanded research on victim crime reporting beyond its usual emphasis on incident attributes, providing for a broader examination of social influences

on the decision-making of victims. Their interpretation of social influences referred mainly to the nature of interactions victims had with a limited number of people within their direct social environment and how these individuals, including friends, relatives, and bystanders, influenced reporting decisions by advising victims to call the police. As a result, Ruback and colleagues did not incorporate the potential role of the larger social context such as neighborhood, city, state, or national factors that may influence victims' decision-making process.

To explain why one should view victims' decisions to call the police from a broader contextual perspective, Pescosolido's (1992) work on how people seek medical care offers an illuminative conceptual model. She argued that networks and the larger structures, including social norms, attitudes, resources, organizations, institutions, laws, and policy initiatives across the victim's social context, are an integral part of help-seeking decisions. Although Pescosolido (1992) did not provide a comprehensive list of contextual factors to be examined, her work, including her later extension of the research to the broader social symbiome framework (Pescosolido et al. 2016), highlighted the importance of conceptualizing help-seeking decisions, including whether or not to notify the police, in relation to the wide range of temporal and spatial contexts within which the decisions are contemplated (also see Goudriaan et al. 2004). Before we elaborate on this in our suggested integrated theoretical model (see below), it is instructive to review macrosociological theories of victim reporting.

Black's Theory of Mobilization of Law and Other Macrosociological Theories

Black's (1976) theory sought to understand the quality and style of law, which includes actions of law mobilization such as victim crime reporting, from a pure sociology standpoint, apart from the motivations and interests of individuals. He posited that, in many social spaces, law is unavailable to citizens and that variation in the mobilization and application of law can be explained by five aspects of social life: stratification, morphology, culture, organization, and social control. For stratification (the vertical distance between people, measured by the difference in wealth or social rank), he noted that the uneven distribution of wealth across gender, race, and age predicts that crimes against the rich, males, older persons, and whites are more likely to be reported to the police than crimes against the poor, females, younger persons, and ethnoracial minorities. For morphology (the horizontal distance between people, indicated by the victim-offender relationship and by the extent to which people are socially integrated through employment, marriage, and other means), he hypothesized that law varies directly with relational distance so that the likelihood of reporting is higher among strangers than among intimates and completely disengaged parties and that law increases with the difference in social integration between victims and offenders. For culture (broadly defined as ideas and expressions), he posited that, all else constant, law is more likely to be invoked by victims with more culture or education and by people who hold more conventional values than people who identify with other subcultures. For organization (the capacity for collective action), he postulated that, compared to individual victims, organizations are more likely to seek protection from the police because as the organization of a society increases so does law. He also noted that group membership indicates an individual's level of being organized, which influences a person's willingness to contact the police. Finally, he compared law to other types of social control exerted by families, schools, churches, and other social institutions. According to Black, law increases when another social control is less readily available.

Empirical studies that have assessed the validity of Black's (1976) theory have yielded mixed results (see, e.g., Avakame et al. 1999, Copes et al. 2001, Gartner & Macmillan 1995, Gottfredson & Hindelang 1979). Consistent with Black's stratification proposition, for example, reporting is positively associated with age (e.g., Bosick et al. 2012, Hart & Rennison 2003, Watkins 2005).

However, contrary to other predictions concerning stratification, the victimizations of women and African Americans are often found to be reported to the police at higher rates (see, e.g., Bachman 1998, Felson et al. 1999, Fisher et al. 2003, Pino & Meier 1999). Such gender and race effects also have been shown to vary by type of crime (Baumer & Lauritsen 2010), gender of the offender (Felson & Paré 2005), and race of the offender as well as the racial context of the community in which the crime occurs (Warner 1992, Xie & Lauritsen 2012).

Research on the victim-offender relationship has similarly demonstrated the importance of changing social environment, including changing laws, for understanding victim reporting, an issue Black (1976) did not address in his original work. Although Black's (1976) morphology hypothesis stated that victimizations involving strangers are more frequently reported to the police than victimizations involving familial, intimate, or friendship relationships, the empirical results are mixed (e.g., Bachman 1993, Felson et al. 1999, Fisher et al. 2003, Gartner & Macmillan 1995, Kaukinen 2002). Using the NCS data from the 1970s and early 1980s, several studies found that stranger rapes were more likely to be reported to the police than nonstranger rapes (e.g., Jensen & Karpos 1993, Lizotte 1985). Using the NCVS data in later years, however, many studies failed to detect such a pattern (e.g., Bachman 1998, Baumer et al. 2003, Felson et al. 1999, Jensen & Karpos 1993). Some scholars have attributed substantive meanings to this change and argued that it was caused by changes in sex-role attitudes in the United States (e.g., Orcutt & Faison 1988) or by the success of rape law reforms and media campaigns (e.g., Bachman 1993, Spohn & Horney 1992). The evidence from the United Kingdom similarly supported the notion that research and policy attention to rape, sexual assault, and domestic violence had led to more adequate handling of such crimes and that this had resulted in a greater willingness of victims to report crimes by intimate friends and relatives (Tarling & Morris 2010).

Black's (1976) theory has also stimulated research on the social context of victim crime reporting. According to the informal social control model (Black 1976), for example, victims in rural areas are expected to experience more informal social controls and thus are posited to be less likely to report to the police than victims in urban areas (also see Rennison et al. 2013, Ruback & Ménard 2001). The relevant empirical evidence is mixed, with some studies finding no difference in reporting rates across urban, suburban, and rural areas (e.g., Kaylen & Pridemore 2015, Laub 1981) and others finding that urban areas have lower rates of reporting than nonurban areas and that the specific patterns may vary across different relationships between victims and offenders (e.g., Baumer & Lauritsen 2010).

More recent theory and research suggest that the informal social control model advanced by Black (1976) may be underdeveloped. People who reside in places that lack informal social controls such as collective efficacy may have misgivings about seeking help from the police or face difficulties securing adequate public services, including formal police protection (Anderson 1999, Baumer 2002, Rose & Clear 1998). In a review of the evidence for all sides, Baumer (2002) noted that differences in access to informal social controls are inadequate on their own for explaining the variations in victim crime reporting. He proposed a theoretical synthesis, suggesting that victim decisions to notify the police may be influenced not only by access to informal social controls but also more broadly by the availability of alternative nonpolice resources for dealing with crime. Thus far, with the exception of some small-scale survey and interview data on receipt of social support from family and friends, few studies have advanced in this direction, even though more researchers and policy-makers in the United States and abroad have recognized the need for building infrastructures for research on the victim services field (e.g., Langton 2011, Sullivan 2011, Xie & Lynch 2017) and the public health and medical systems (e.g., Campbell 2006, Kaylen & Pridemore 2015, Stark et al. 1981) beyond police assistance.

Summary of Extant Theoretical Approaches to Victim Crime Reporting

Victims' police notification behavior is a decision that intersects several literatures, encompassing perceptions of crime seriousness; differential exposure to social norms and attitudes toward social control and police work; the influence of social networks on help-seeking; the impact of socioeconomic, demographic, and political structures; and access to informal social controls and alternative resources to address and redress victimization. Although inherently multifaceted and multidisciplinary, the relevant literatures are largely disconnected from one another. We propose a unifying framework that ties together these ideas, organizing the integrated framework around the concept of help-seeking (Rogler & Cortes 1993, Wills & DePaulo 1991). Our integrated framework conceptualizes victims' police reporting behavior as one of many potential ways victims utilize the helping resources within their environments to achieve positive adaptations. This framework, as we explain below, provides a foundation for systematic research in this area.

A MULTILEVEL, CONTEXTUALIZED HELP-SEEKING MODEL

The flowchart in **Figure 1** presents a graphical view of the key components of the victim help-seeking model we propose. The model integrates knowledge across multiple theoretical perspectives and levels of analysis, and it illuminates important areas for further empirical research.

Police Notification as Part of a Broader Array of Help-Seeking Behaviors

The central component of the proposed model is the conceptualization of police notification as a form of help-seeking, juxtaposed against alternatives such as getting help from bystanders, family, friends, medical professionals, and social service agencies. The help-seeking literature indicates that police notification is only one of several coping options available to victims (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005). Therefore, the portrayal of victims as passive and helpless because they do not contact the police, which is a common feature of police notification studies, may be misleading if other actions that may have been taken are overlooked.

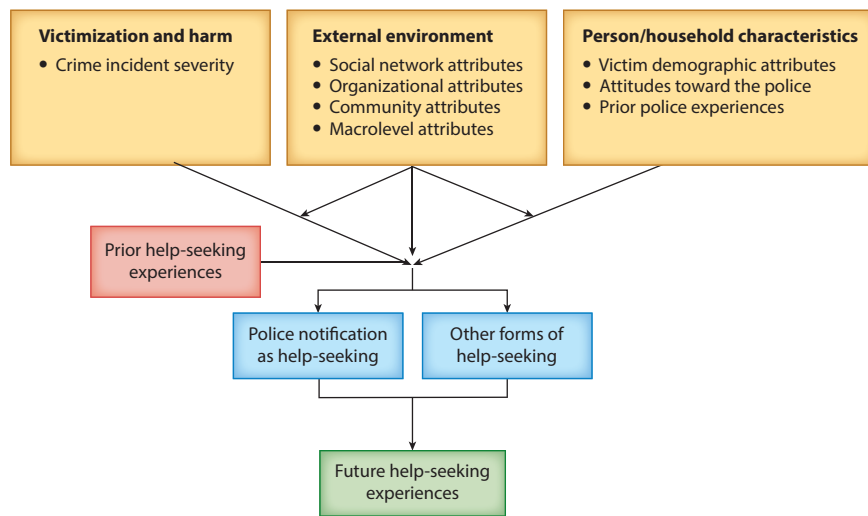


Figure 1

A multilevel, contextualized model of crime reporting to the police as a form of help-seeking.

Table 1 presents data on rates of help-seeking behavior in response to crime in various contexts. Although the estimated rates vary notably across different social settings, crime types, and data collection instruments, several important features of the data are noteworthy. One is that in both developed and developing countries, victims often rely more on informal helping systems than on formal/professional sources of support (e.g., Ansara & Hindin 2010, Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005, Kaukinen 2004). Also, for those victims who seek police assistance, informal helpers including family and friends, medical/health professionals, and to a lesser extent victim/social service agencies, are additional important sources of support (Kaukinen 2004). In the help-seeking literature, the preponderance of research deals with violence against women, whereas the needs and actions of other victims (e.g., male victims, children/adolescent victims, and female victims of stranger/acquaintance violence) are under-researched areas (also see reviews by Finkelhor et al. 2001, Sylaska & Edwards 2014). Cultural or institutional barriers may make male victims less willing to contact the police, and they may also inhibit access to victim services and professional help (Douglas & Hines 2011, Machado et al. 2016). Adolescents' sources of help are likely to be restricted as well because of limited information sources, peer norms, and values that discourage help-seeking from formal services (Ashley & Foshee 2005). Overall, these observations support the value of evaluating police notification decisions as part of a broader array of help-seeking behaviors.

A Multilevel Explanatory Model

Like the research on victims' use of police, the more general help-seeking literature also indicates that victims' efforts to seek assistance are products of cognitive processes, including victims' appraisal of the crime, deciding whether to elicit help in light of that appraisal, and choosing a source of support (Fanslow & Robinson 2010, McCart et al. 2010). Crime incident, individual, interpersonal, sociostructural, and cultural factors are likely to affect the cognitive processes. Our model in **Figure 1** depicts this network of influences. By building on theoretical models from Andersen (1995), Pescosolido (1992), and Goudriaan et al. (2004), we identify three broad sets of factors that influence help-seeking decisions. Victimization and harm factors refer to the well-studied incident-level characteristics that influence victims' subjective perception of the incident severity and needs. Person/household characteristics include individual- and household-level factors such as demographic, social, and economic characteristics, perceptions of the police, and perceptions of other help-seeking resources that influence victims' decisions to employ various help-seeking strategies when a need arises. External environment factors refer to contextual features of the interpersonal and place levels that either facilitate or impede utilization of formal and informal assistance.

The first two dimensions of the proposed model—victimization and harm and person/household characteristics—have been described extensively elsewhere within the literature on police notification and help-seeking (e.g., see reviews by Gottfredson & Gottfredson 1988, McCart et al. 2010, Skogan 1984, Sylaska & Edwards 2014). Given this, and because there remains considerable uncertainty about the contextual mechanisms, we elaborate on the environmental contextual factors that may be relevant to help-seeking. Such contextual factors can be studied from levels as specific as an interpersonal social network to as broad as the global environment. A person can simultaneously be a member of a network, a neighborhood, or an arbitrary number of collective units, so these levels need not be mutually exclusive or follow a specific hierarchical order. Yet, for the review, we discuss separately contextual factors relevant to networks, organizations, neighborhoods, and macrolevel settings.

Social networks. In the victim help-seeking literature, researchers have used a social interaction, or social network, approach that links help-seeking options with the sociodemographic

Table 1 Rates of help-seeking in response to crime in various contexts

Source	Sample	Crime type	Help-seeking rates
Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005	Subnational (15 sites in 10 countries) WHO multicountry study, 2000–2003 <i>n</i> = varied by site (152 ~ 1,099 women)	IPV against women aged 15 to 49 years	Bangladesh 1%; 5%~7% (rate of calling police; seeking help from any source) Ethiopia 2%; 45% Japan 3%; 7% Samoa 5%; 15% Thailand 5~11%; 10%~20% Tanzania 7~15%; 41% Brazil 10~18%; 22%~45% Serbia and Montenegro 12%; 22% Namibia 21%; 38% Peru 25%; 33%~37%
Langton 2011	National (USA) NCVS 1993–2009	Serious violent crimes (including rape/sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault)	58% police (serious violence combined) 9% victim service agencies (serious violence combined) 23% victim service agencies (serious IPV) 8% victim service agencies (serious not-IPV)
Kaukinen 2004	National (USA) NVAWS 1994–1996 <i>n</i> = 334 women	Violence against women (combining sexual and physical assault, stalking, and violent threat)	30% police 5% social service agency 20% psychiatrist/doctor 52% family/friend/neighbor
Fanslow & Robinson 2010	National (New Zealand) Violence Against Women Survey <i>n</i> = 956 women	IPV against women aged 18 to 64 years (combining physical and sexual violence)	13% police 23% told no one 45% family/friends only 28% family/friends and formal sources (including police) 4% formal sources only (including police)
Ansara & Hindin 2010	National (Canada) General Social Survey 2004 <i>n</i> = 696 women, 471 men	IPV against women and men	Women
			Men
Ashley & Foshee 2005	Subnational (USA, rural North Carolina county) <i>n</i> = 225 high school students	Dating violence	5% police 60% no help sought 37% any informal source 16% any formal source
Machado et al. 2016	National (Portugal, online survey of respondents recruited through mailing lists and websites) <i>n</i> = 89 men	IPV against men	3% police 77% no help sought 17% friends 16% family 13% health professionals 6% victim services

Abbreviations: IPV, intimate partner violence; NCVS, National Crime Victimization Survey; NVAWS, Violence and Threats of Violence against Women and Men in the United States Survey, 1994–1996; WHO, World Health Organization.

characteristics of help-seekers and with various network characteristics and social ties (Gourash 1978, Hutchison & Hirschel 1998). This research suggests that, although victim-network interactions can sometimes have negative consequences, such as victim blaming (e.g., Davis & Brickman 1996, Littleton 2010), networks also often have positive effects by providing emotional, informational (referral), and material resources to facilitate victims' use of a variety of help-seeking resources (e.g., Greenberg & Ruback 1992, Kaukinen 2002, Mason & Benson 1996, Starzynski et al. 2007). Networks may serve as a natural support system that protects their members and mitigates the detrimental effects of crime (Kaniasty & Norris 1992). Among other benefits, this can reduce the need for police and other professional assistance and reserve such resources for when they are most necessary.

Networks can also transmit values and norms that discourage help-seeking. The norm of self-reliance, or a code of silence among some elderly groups (Kosberg 2009), school students (Syvertsen et al. 2009), and college students (Epstein 2002) is an example of such an inhibitor. This insight has informed studies of differences in victims' help-seeking intention and behavior across gender, age, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (e.g., Douglas & Hines 2011, Hunter et al. 2004, Kaukinen 2004, Morrison et al. 2006), but we know relatively little about how the key structural characteristics of networks (i.e., network size, density, physical proximity, patterns of connections between members, positional statuses that network members possess, and relative amounts of contact with family/friends as opposed to professional networks) influence whether and from whom help is sought among victims of crime. This is an area that is in need of theory development and empirical research.

Organizational context. Organizational context refers to the organizations and institutions in which people work and study such as schools, colleges, and workplaces that have been shown to influence a variety of victimization outcomes, including police notification and other help-seeking (e.g., Addington et al. 2002, Baum & Klaus 2005, Fisher et al. 2009, Hart & Colavito 2011). The results of many studies indicate that victimizations in schools, colleges, and workplaces generally have lower rates of police notification than crimes committed elsewhere (Finkelhor & Wolak 2003, Goudriaan & Nieuwbeerta 2007). The presence of alternative reporting options in school and work settings is a contributing factor because, when questioned about why they did not call the police, many victims stated that they reported the crime to another official (Hart & Rennison 2003, Warchol 1998). In California, for instance, the occupational health and injury prevention communities have identified police files and employers' reports as two separate and nonredundant sources of information for the reporting of workplace assault injuries because reports to the police are shown to have a different profile than those reported through employers, and the two systems have only a small overlap (Peek-Asa et al. 1998). In schools, supervisory and disciplinary authorities such as teachers and school administrators are frequently utilized as a primary source of social control and help (Finkelhor & Ormrod 2001). Meanwhile, there is mixed evidence on whether the use of school security personnel (also called school resource officers) encourages or actually discourages students to report offenses to the police or school officials (e.g., Na & Gottfredson 2013, Watkins & Maume 2011).

Other organizational characteristics that have been identified in the literature as determinants of victim reporting include efforts to engender a school climate that is intolerant of bullying and aggressive behavior (Eliot et al. 2010, Unnever & Cornell 2004), the development of apathy toward crime found in some educational and workforce settings (Hart & Colavito 2011), and organizational policies and regulations that establish internal rules on risk management and violence reporting (Atkinson 2000). These attributes influence victims' shared perceptions of the behaviors that are rewarded and supported by organizational policies.

Neighborhood context. Very few studies have linked neighborhood conditions to the victim help-seeking process, including the decision to contact the police, largely because of the lack of data at the neighborhood level. Particularly, despite scholarly interest in the impact of neighborhoods on crime reporting (e.g., Baumer 2002, Berg et al. 2013, Goudriaan et al. 2006, Schaible & Hughes 2012, Slocum et al. 2010, Warner 1992, Zhang et al. 2007), major victimization surveys such as those conducted in the United States (the NCVS) and the United Kingdom (the CSEW) and by the UN (the ICVS) have been usually analyzed without neighborhood identifiers. Typically, these geographic identifiers are removed from available data for confidentiality reasons.

Although some early studies questioned the importance of neighborhood effects on reporting (e.g., Bennett & Wiegand 1994, Fishman 1979, Gottfredson & Hindelang 1979), attention to neighborhoods has slowly reemerged in the study of victim reporting over the past few decades. Baumer (2002) used the area-identified NCVS data to reveal a significant nonlinear relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and the reporting of simple assault that shows that only victims who resided in neighborhoods of extreme disadvantage experienced a sharp reduction in the likelihood of police notification. Such a relationship could have been easily overlooked in earlier work. In the Netherlands, Goudriaan et al. (2006) similarly observed that neighborhood socioeconomic disadvantage negatively influences victims' reporting decisions, especially when neighborhood disadvantage reaches a high level (such as the 90th percentile), causing an accelerating rate of reduction in police notification corresponding to the increase in disadvantage. Goudriaan et al. (2006) also showed that social cohesion mediates part of the effect of neighborhood disadvantage. In additional studies, the mediating role of social disorganization on the association between neighborhood disadvantage and crime reporting outcomes has received mixed support, with the scope of the inquiry having since been expanded to include populations with diverse region, age, and nationality traits (see, e.g., Berg et al. 2013, Schaible & Hughes 2012, Slocum et al. 2010, Zhang et al. 2007).

In comparison, other dimensions of neighborhood structure remain underanalyzed. Several plausible cultural and sociostructural neighborhood conditions—such as crime levels and differences in crime tolerance (Anderson 1999), group dynamics of competition or collaboration (Warner 1992), the presence of formal community organizations (Schoenberg & Rosenbaum 1980), and linkages to outside resources that are instrumental to successful collective action (Schoenberg & Rosenbaum 1980)—have not been considered in studies of help-seeking. Even classic structural features of neighborhoods have received relatively little attention. For example, there has been much speculation in the contemporary era that the rates of cooperation with and reporting to the police may be significantly lower in immigrant neighborhoods, but this possibility has only recently been explored by researchers. Thus far, the empirical evidence has been mixed (Gutierrez & Kirk 2017, Kirk et al. 2012, Schnebly 2008). Xie & Baumer's (2017) analysis of NCVS data suggests that the inconsistencies are lessened after the victims' residential county's history of immigrant incorporation is considered. They found that neighborhood immigrant concentration has no significant impact on crime reporting within traditional immigrant counties, but it strongly suppresses reporting in counties outside traditional destinations. The findings reinforce the evidence that the broader macrolevel context is also relevant to understanding victim help-seeking behaviors.

Macrolevel context. The larger macrolevel contexts in which victims are situated encompass both regional and local governmental context within a nation, such as cities and metro areas, and the national context itself. At the subnational level, the distinction between rural and urban victims' help-seeking behavior has been most extensively studied. In their study of rural policing, Weisheit et al. (1995) noted that rural areas are contextually different from urban areas not only because

of some objective measures such as lower population density and greater geographic isolation but also because of selected cultural traits such as a focus on informal social control, mistrust of government, and a reluctance to share internal problems with those outside of the community. The objective measures alone pose challenges for access to victim services because of inadequate availability and poor accessibility of services in rural areas (Lewis 2003, McGrail & Humphreys 2009). The prevailing culture in rural areas along with concerns about privacy, confidentiality, and community/family backlash can further lead victims toward informal help resources and away from formal channels (e.g., DeKeseredy & Schwartz 2009, Laub 1981, Rennison et al. 2013, Weisheit et al. 1995). So far, these arguments have received considerable empirical support in the literature (e.g., see reviews by Edwards 2015, Ruback & Ménard 2001). However, against these arguments, studies also have reported similar rates of police notification and emergency room treatment in rural and urban areas when the attributes of crimes and victims are held constant (e.g., Kaylen & Pridemore 2015). Kaylen & Pridemore (2013) also found that in rural areas, the underreporting of crime creates measurement problems for official crime indicators such as UCR arrest rates and that this affects the understanding and evaluation of criminological theories. These mixed findings clearly warrant the need for additional research on the rural-urban differences in crime reporting.

Beyond the rural-urban divide, there is some evidence that considerable differences exist in victim help-seeking rates across local governmental units, including major metropolitan areas, counties, municipalities, townships, and special districts in the United States. Specifically, research on satisfaction with urban services based on local resident surveys has revealed large variations across sampled cities and racial/ethnic groups in evaluations of municipal service performance, particularly of the police (e.g., Rossi et al. 1974). Echoing this perspective, the 12-city survey administered in 1998 by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) (Smith et al. 1999) showed differences in the rate of violent and property crimes being reported to the police across the cities, but the comparison was with tabular values of reporting rates not in the context of multivariate analyses that held constant characteristics of crimes and victims. In 2007, the BJS released a special subset of the NCVS data for 40 metropolitan areas, and the data have been used by a few scholars to model variation across metropolitan areas in victim reporting rates (e.g., Gutierrez & Kirk 2017, Miller & Segal 2014, Xie 2014, Xie & Lauritsen 2012). These studies included a rich set of metro-level covariates to identify the sources of variation in victim reporting, including the gender composition of the local police force (Miller & Segal 2014), the demographic and socioeconomic attributes of local residents (Gutierrez & Kirk 2017), and the degree of stratification across residential, economic, racial/ethnic, and political sectors (Xie & Lauritsen 2012). However, as the number of sample cities or metro areas in this literature has remained relatively small compared to the whole nation, systematic efforts need to be focused on developing more comprehensive data that extends the geographic coverage of the comparisons, which is a central component of the most current NCVS redesign, as noted above in the section titled *Victimization Surveys* (Langton et al. 2017).

The national context is yet another macrolevel component that is important for understanding individual differences in victims' help-seeking behavior (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005, Van Dijk et al. 2007). A study by Goudriaan et al. (2004) using the ICVS data for 16 Western industrialized countries revealed that although crime severity and characteristics of victims and offenders are important, they do not fully account for the cross-country variation in victim-police notification patterns. This is especially so when the countries show strong heterogeneity in the perceived competence of the police, which was demonstrated in their study to be a significant predictor of police notification among victims of property crimes, whereas, conversely, other attributes of the national context, such as a country's norm of conformity, individualism/collectivism, institutionalization of insurance business, and crime rates, showed no significant impact.

Defining national norms and capturing their full complexity are extraordinarily difficult objectives, but Goudriaan et al.'s (2004) work has been instrumental in drawing greater attention to the importance of national context. Related studies have extended Goudriaan et al.'s (2004) work in four directions: more countries, more data sets, more complex measures of perceived police legitimacy and effectiveness, and more national-level covariates not considered in previous studies. For example, using ICVS data for 42 industrialized and developing countries, Soares (2004) found that the countries' crime reporting rates are related to measures of police presence (number of police per capita), institutional stability (years of continuous democratic stability since 1930), and subjective perception of corruption. These results support the notion that a nation's institutional quality is predictive of crime reporting. However, in a different sample of ICVS data for 16 countries in transition and 7 developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, Estienne & Morabito (2016) found that the countries' governance score, which is a combined index of voice and accountability, government effectiveness, rule of law, and control of corruption, is unrelated to crime reporting, whereas the countries' economic development indicated by the reduction of national income inequality is associated with increased crime reporting. Most recently, Torrente et al. (2017) compared 14 countries in four European socioeconomic areas (northern, central, eastern, and southern countries) using data from the EU ICS. They found that the factors that influence victim reporting are not universal: the perception of police efficacy is associated with crime reporting only in Eastern Europe, and social inequalities influence crime reporting in southern and Eastern Europe more than they do in the north. Given the mixed results obtained in cross-national studies, it is premature to draw definitive conclusions about the relative importance of institutional versus economic factors, but the findings thus far clearly reinforce the view that victim help-seeking is a context-embedded social phenomenon. Cross-national collaboration projects such as the ICVS, the World Values Survey, and the International Social Survey Programme can be very useful for examining patterns and correlates of victim reporting rates by nation worldwide.

The Dynamic Nature of the Integrated Help-Seeking Model

The bulk of prior research on victim police notification and other forms of help-seeking have highlighted static elements. In contrast, our integrative model recognizes that help-seeking is a dynamic process in two respects. First, the way people view help-seeking and utilize the police and other resources may change as a function of prior help-seeking experiences (e.g., Bell et al. 2009, Hickman & Simpson 2003, Xie et al. 2006). Second, the conditions that shape help-seeking behaviors may change over time to produce important shifts in help-seeking across populations (e.g., Baumer et al. 2003, Baumer & Lauritsen 2010, Xie 2014).

The first dimension of change is the degree to which there are feedback effects in the help-seeking process. That is, because the help-seeking process is iterative, with victims constantly defining problems, exploring different information and helping resources, evaluating their relevance, and choosing or rejecting helping agents (Greenberg & Ruback 1992), we need to understand how the process of feedback, particularly the two-way interaction between the victims and the police and other service providers, fits into the process of help-seeking behavior change. There is a long line of research on the frequency and nature of public-police contact and how this affects perceptions of and cooperation with the police (see review by Brown & Benedict 2002), but the literature is relatively sparse when it comes to victim decision-making. This is because the majority of the studies most relevant to victim help-seeking either do not ask participants about their actual victimization experiences or if they do, they tend to rely on interviews, participant observations, and other ethnographic techniques that reduce sample sizes and the generalizability of the results (see review by Slocum 2018).

Empirical tests of victims' experiences with law enforcement and the resulting impact on crime reporting in the United States exist in only a few studies of the NCVS (Conaway & Lohr 1994, Slocum 2018, Xie et al. 2006), plus a study of domestic violence victims in a Spouse Assault Replication Program (SARP) conducted in Metro-Dade County, Florida (Hickman & Simpson 2003; for relevant studies in other countries, see review by Koster et al. 2016). The results of these studies suggest that the effects of a prior experience with law enforcement may depend on whether the contact was voluntary or involuntary. For example, both Xie et al. (2006) and Hickman & Simpson (2003) found that police's responses to victims' calls after their victimization, which is a form of voluntary contact, significantly affect their decisions to call the police in subsequent crimes, whereas other studies show that police-initiated contacts, which are mostly involuntary contacts, negatively impact victim reporting of personal and household crimes, especially when the poor and African Americans are involved and when the contacts are perceived as unjust (Slocum 2018). These results illustrate the importance of considering feedback effects.

Studies of nonpolice victim assistance resources similarly lack attention to feedback effects. This is true of victim service providers, for example. Data from the NCVS and BCS suggest that the use of victim support services is associated with more favorable outcomes, such as less revictimization (Xie & Lynch 2017) and better overall assessments of the criminal justice system (Bradford 2011). In this literature, however, the information on the impact of specific forms of victim services on subsequent help-seeking remains elusive. As Sullivan (2011) noted, it is difficult to assess the impact of victim service programs on victims' subsequent experiences for several reasons, including concerns about protecting victims' identities and maintaining their safety, and respecting the anonymity of service providers. More research is needed on whether and how accessing victim support services may shape future outcomes for victims. Such information would be important in directing service-planning efforts by both the police and other service providers.

A second dynamic implication of our integrated model is the degree of societal and contextual changes over time that influence individual help-seeking behavior, including (*a*) changes in norms about whether a behavior constitutes a crime, (*b*) changes in norms concerning individual versus social obligations and the legitimacy of laws, and (*c*) changes in technology, public infrastructure, law enforcement policies, and service availability and delivery that may trigger changes in victim help-seeking patterns (Baumer & Lauritsen 2010, Goudriaan et al. 2004). Currently, as mentioned above in section titled *Victimization Surveys*, there are very few published accounts of longitudinal patterns of victim help-seeking. The literature on victims' reactions to rape and domestic violence has most frequently addressed this matter, as a great deal of important theoretical work and debate have been carried out to investigate changes in perceptions of gender roles, perceptions of sexual crimes, gender inequalities, and the resulting changes in criminal laws, policy initiatives, and victim help-seeking behaviors over time (e.g., Bachman & Paternoster 1993, Baumer et al. 2003, Clay-Warner & Burt 2005, Spohn & Horney 1992, Wolitzky-Taylor et al. 2011). For other types of crimes, there is still a long way to go before a predictive understanding of cross-time differentials in help-seeking patterns is established (Baumer & Lauritsen 2010, Xie 2014).

EMPIRICAL IMPLICATIONS, DATA INFRASTRUCTURE, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Three overarching empirical implications emerge from our integrated model of victim help-seeking. First, to understand victim crime reporting or other reactions to crime, it is essential to measure and assess the myriad ways that victims seek help following a crime. Second, although incident seriousness and selected personal and household attributes are critical to understanding help-seeking patterns, it is also necessary to consider the broader context in which victimization

Table 2 Overview of the quality of data in three major national-level victimization surveys^a

	NCVS (2016)	CSEW (2017–18)	ICVS (2005)
Help-seeking options			
Police	Fair	Fair	Fair
Victim service agencies	Very limited	Fair	Very limited
Health professionals	Fair	Fair	Very limited
Other agencies/organizations	No data	Fair	No data
Family/friends/other informal help	No data	Very limited	No data
Victimization and harm	Good	Good	Fair
Personal/household characteristics			
Victim demographic attributes	Good	Good	Good
Attitudes toward the police	No data	Fair	Very limited
Prior police experiences	Very limited	Fair	No data
External environment			
Social network attributes	No data	No data	No data
Organizational attributes	Very limited	Very limited	No data
Community attributes	Very limited	Very limited	Very limited
Subnational geographic identifiers	Fair	Fair	Very limited
Longitudinal data structure			
Person/household-level change	Fair	No data	No data
National-level estimates over time	Good	Fair	Very limited

Abbreviations: CSEW, Crime Survey for England and Wales; ICVS, International Crime Victims Survey; NCVS, National Crime Victimization Survey.

^aTopic coverage is indicated by no data, very limited, fair, and good.

occurs, including features of social networks, organizations, neighborhoods, local governments, and nation-states. Finally, help-seeking is inherently dynamic and, therefore, empirical assessments should attend to how help-seeking decisions at one point in time affect subsequent help-seeking decisions and also how changes in key explanatory variables elicit changes in help-seeking behavior.

Currently, the major national-level sources of information about victim reactions to crime are not well-suited to evaluating the integrated model we have described. As **Table 2** shows, the NCVS, CSEW (formerly BCS), and ICVS are uneven in their capacity to document the different help-seeking options pursued by crime victims. These surveys all provide useful information about whether or not the police were notified but limited or no information about other forms of help-seeking. The NCVS contains some information about whether respondents access victim services, but little detail is provided about the nature of those contacts. Additionally, the NCVS does not inquire about whether victims rely on family, friends, or other social network members for help. The CSEW and ICVS are characterized by similar limitations, although the CSEW has more information on victims' contact with alternative helping resources, especially for victims of partner abuse. Alternative forms of help-seeking may complement or substitute for one another, and in either case the limited data on nonpolice help-seeking in existing sources yield an incomplete portrait of how victims respond to crime.

Additionally, the large national sources listed in **Table 2** all emphasize the collection of data on potential explanatory variables related to what we call victimization and harm and personal/household characteristics factors. Nevertheless, in each instance, there are limits to what is

captured. For example, the NCVS does not incorporate indicators relevant to victim perceptions of the police, or their prior experiences with the police except that some limited information can be retrieved from linking the NCVS data longitudinally across multiple interviews of the same persons (Xie et al. 2006) or by linking the main NCVS data with the Police Public Contact Survey (PPCS), a supplement to the NCVS (Slocum 2018). The ICVS asks a single question on this topic: “Taking everything into account, how good do you think the police in your area are at controlling crime?” (Van Dijk et al. 2007, p. 230). The CSEW does better in developing survey modules on perceptions of police trust, effectiveness, respect, and fairness as well as questions on various forms of experiences with the police, but the questions are only asked of smaller subsamples, and the modules vary from year to year.

An even more substantial omission is the limited availability of information on what we call the environmental context in which victims experience crime. The ICVS identifies the nation-states from which respondents are drawn but has limited information on the intranational locations of their residence or the crimes they experience. The NCVS gathers geographic identifiers on the neighborhoods, cities, counties, and metro areas within which victims reside, but this information is not widely available to researchers. Similarly, the CSEW supports the capacity to study how local governmental and neighborhood contexts shape victim reporting decisions, but this information is not incorporated in public-use versions of the data and can only be accessed through the UK Data Service Secure Lab.

All three of the data sources listed in **Table 2** permit dynamic assessment of changes in victim crime-reporting rates over time for different lengths, but only the NCVS supports dynamic analyses of within-person changes in help-seeking decisions. Because the NCVS uses a rotating panel design, it is possible to assess how victims’ decisions to notify the police at one time point impact subsequent decisions about police notification on the basis of whether the police responded to the calls and their actions afterward (Xie et al. 2006). However, as noted above, the NCVS does not capture many other help-seeking behaviors in which victims may engage, and it lacks important details about victim perceptions of help-seeking experiences, which are critical to understanding feedback effects.

Although useful, the sources highlighted in **Table 2** have notable limitations in supporting a comprehensive assessment of victim help-seeking behaviors, as suggested by our integrated model. These sources could be significantly enhanced by integrating information on a wider array of help-seeking behaviors that victims may pursue, asking about prior experiences and perceptions of help-seeking options, and gathering additional details about victims’ social networks, organizations, and communities. We encourage future redesigns of these sources to consider expanded coverage along these lines. Recognizing that such design shifts are costly and time-consuming to implement, we also encourage more targeted localized data collections of victim experiences, which could be tailored to the specific help-seeking options available or under consideration in given communities and could gather extensive information on subjects that might be difficult to incorporate into the large national surveys, such as victim perceptions of the crime and the police, social network attributes, organizational affiliations, and community conditions.

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