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## Victim Profiling

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## Victim Profiling

### Abstract

This paper analyzes victims in the process of criminal profiling, with a particular focus on the role of their characteristics in the offender's selection process. The aim of the research is to identify key elements of victimological profiles and assess how social, psychological, and behavioral factors influence the likelihood of becoming a victim. The research questions include: What factors contribute to the selection of a specific victim? How do lifestyle and routine affect the risk of victimization? In what ways can victim analysis contribute to identifying perpetrators and preventing future crimes? The central hypothesis of this study is that there is a clear connection between a victim's characteristics, lifestyle, and the risk of victimization. It is assumed that criminals deliberately select victims based on their vulnerabilities, routines, and social traits, and that analyzing these factors can lead to more effective crime resolution and improved prevention strategies. The research relies on both deductive and inductive analysis of available studies, legal documents, and statistical crime data. Methods used include victimological analysis, case analysis, and comparative evaluation of existing victim profiling models.

*Keywords:* victim profiling, victimology, criminal profiling, victim interaction, approach method, attack method, risk assessment.

### Introduction

Perhaps no element in the criminal profiling process has been more overlooked than the victim. For this reason, the Behavioral Science Unit of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) actively collects data on the social and behavioral characteristics and reputations of victims. One of the most obvious elements in victim profiling is the physical description. In addition, it is crucial to gather as much information as possible about the victim's marital status, daily activities, and personality traits. Understanding the victim's occupation and level of education expands the network of relationships. Likewise, the victim's place of residence can play a significant role in the victimization process. The benefits of knowing the victim's medical history include information about infectious diseases and body identification. When developing any psychological profile of a victim, special attention should be given to their sexual history, personality, legal history, and activities before the crime (Holmes, 1989). Victim profiles refer to either the distinctive demographic characteristics of crime victims (e.g., age, race, and sex) or individual traits (e.g., self-control and genetic factors) that correspond to having a greater probability of victimization. Victim profiles assume that victimization is not a random event. In fact, data show that many factors are linked with victimization risk (Schreck & Posick, 2014). The technique of victim profiling is used similarly to offender profiling, but its primary goal is to analyze the traits that make individuals more susceptible to certain types of crimes. Through this method, it is possible to identify vulnerable groups and better understand the factors that put them at risk, enabling the prediction of offender behavior patterns and the improvement of preventive strategies.

There is a general consensus among many criminal profilers that the victim plays an important (or even key) role in shaping the circumstances that precede a crime. Why do criminals choose a specific victim? Is the victim in the wrong place at the wrong time? (MacGavin, 2019). "In two classic criminological

studies—one conducted by Hans von Hentig and another by Stephen Schafer—the crucial role of the victim in the criminal process was first identified. These authors were among the first to suggest that the victim's behavior is often a key factor in a crime and that their actions may actually initiate the crime. Both believe that studying crime is incomplete unless the role of the victim is considered" (Siegel, 2004: 14). In many cases, the interaction between the offender and the victim plays a crucial role in shaping the course and outcome of the criminal act. Studying the victim's behavior provides deeper insight into the circumstances of the crime, helps identify the offender's motives, and reveals potential risks. This approach is not aimed at shifting responsibility onto the victim but at considering all relevant factors to make investigations more thorough, ensure justice is more effectively served, and enhance preventive measures.

What is Victimology? "Victimology is the detailed study and analysis of victim characteristics. The traits of victims targeted by a specific offender can provide insights into the offender's motives, modus operandi, and recognizable behavioral patterns. A part of victimology includes risk assessment. A profiler does not focus solely on the level of risk the victim's lifestyle routinely exposed them to but also on the risk they faced at the moment of the attack, as well as the level of risk the offender was willing to take to reach them. In the deductive method of criminal profiling, almost as much time is devoted to profiling each individual victim as to analyzing the characteristics of the offender responsible for the crime" (Turvey, 1999: 29). This approach not only facilitates the faster identification of offenders but also helps develop more effective preventive measures that could protect potential victims from similar attacks in the future.

### **Victim analysis from the perspective of a criminal profiler**

What should an investigator consider when reconstructing the victim's lifestyle and activities before their demise? An investigator should consider the following aspects from the list, which is by no means exhaustive (MacGavin, 2019):

- **Physical Characteristics:** Does this victim share similarities with other recent murder victims? Does their appearance fit the typology of a serial killer's preference? Why was this victim chosen? Was it due to a specific body type, hair color, height, or weight?
- **Personal Lifestyle:** Did the victim lead a sedentary lifestyle, or did they have an active and open lifestyle that made them more visible to a potential stalker or killer? What were their daily routines? Could a pattern be established through observation? Did the victim use drugs or alcohol? Were they in a romantic relationship? Were they married or engaged?
- **Occupation:** Did their occupation put them at risk? Did they work in jobs that increased their exposure to danger, such as night-shift nurses or bartenders? Did their job involve public visibility?
- **Timeline of Last Known Activities:** Where was the victim before their death? Who was with them? Who was the last person or people to have contact with the victim?
- **Friends and Enemies:** Did the victim have friends who could provide investigators with insights into potential motives? Did the victim have enemies who might have had a reason to harm them? Had they recently angered someone? Had they been involved in any conflicts recently?
- **Criminal History:** Did the victim have a criminal record? If so, what were the reasons for their arrests or incarcerations? What was their current involvement in criminal activities?

- **Medical History:** Was the victim in good health? Were they typically lucid and aware of their surroundings? Were they taking any medications that could impair judgment or alter their consciousness?
- **Family Background:** Did they come from a stable family, or were there circumstances that alienated them from their biological relatives? Did they have close relationships with family members? How frequently did they communicate—daily? Weekly? When was the last time they contacted a family member?
- **Education:** What educational qualifications did the victim have? Did they work in educational institutions, such as colleges or public schools, as teachers? Were they well-liked by students, or was it the opposite? Did any students resent them? Were they romantically involved with a student? Were they engaged in pornography? Did they have close relationships with any of their students or faculty members? (Osterburg & Ward, 2007; MacGavin, 2019).

Individuals involved in the intervention, investigation, or prosecution of child pornography and sex trafficking cases must recognize that offenders often develop a bond with their victims. Many victims willingly exchange sex for attention, affection, and other benefits. Operators of pedophilic networks are, by definition, skilled at gaining long-term cooperation and control over their victims through well-planned seduction. They are experts in identifying and temporarily satisfying the emotional and physical needs of children. They know how to listen to children—an ability that many parents lack. They are willing to spend as much time as necessary to groom a child (MacGavin, 2019). This seemingly positive relationship between the offender and the victim should not be misinterpreted as consent, complicity, or guilt. In one case, a prosecutor told television reporters *that the victims were just as guilty—if not more—than the offenders*. Law enforcement investigators, in particular, must be aware of this issue (Bennett & Hess, 2004: 294). Databases offer an abundance of information about everyday individuals. The average citizen can be found in medical records, birth statistics, tax records, and voter registries, and nearly every interaction with any public or private service leaves behind certain information. Creating a victimological profile requires a complete depiction of the victim's life history up until the moment of their death. This information may provide investigators with clues leading to the crime scene. Did the victim purchase something before their death? Did they use a credit card? Where and at what time did this transaction occur? This provides a timestamp for the victim's last known activities (MacGavin, 2019). Investigators must determine who, what, where, when, why, and how? Who was the victim? Why were they chosen? Where were they going? When did the crime occur, and why did they have to die? How did they die? Background checks often yield useful information unless the victim was off the grid. They may have used cash exclusively and never used a credit card. They may have operated under a false identity to remain unnoticed. Was there a motive for this person's murder? Could records provide useful information about possible reasons for their death? Victims are often eliminated because they pose an obstacle to the offender's perceived lifestyle or ambitions. Perhaps the victim stood in the way of an inheritance. Perhaps the offender was in a romantic relationship, and the victim refused to grant them a divorce. Records and interviews can clarify these possible reasons behind the victim's death. Or was the victim killed randomly? Perhaps the victim was targeted as part of a gang initiation? Records will only indicate the modus operandi in such cases. In situations where the offender and victim are connected through a broader

criminal network or organization bound by a code of silence, the crime may never be solved (MacGavin, 2019). Solving such cases requires a detailed analysis not only of the crime itself but also of the broader social environment in which it occurred. Investigators must consider: the offender's motives, possible connections to criminal groups and behavioral patterns leading up to the crime. Without a thorough investigation and the use of various sources of evidence—such as insider testimony, forensic findings, or digital traces—the risk remains that the offender will go unidentified, and justice will remain out of reach.

A variety of databases are available for examining victims and can provide critical information. In many developed countries, both government and private sources contain detailed records on most citizens, including personal, professional, and social aspects of their lives. Law enforcement agencies have extensive access to these records, not only on a national level but also through international sources, enabling them to retrieve almost any relevant data at any time. To effectively utilize available information, a detailed and systematic investigative summary must be created. This summary should include standardized questions, carefully designed based on insights from similar cases, to ensure consistency and accuracy in data collection. The process should begin with basic personal information, such as name, age, and occupation, and then focus on a more detailed analysis. This analysis should include: the victim's role in the crime, events leading up to the crime, a risk assessment of potential threats the victim faced. The goal is not only to understand the immediate circumstances of the crime but also to identify broader factors that contributed to it, including social, psychological, and economic influences (Bjelajac, 2025, pp. 225-227). Such an approach allows for a comprehensive insight into the situation, facilitates further investigation, and helps develop preventive strategies to reduce the likelihood of similar crimes in the future.

### **Interaction with the victim**

This statement highlights the controversial idea that the way an offender interacts with their victim reflects their motive and psychological characteristics. We tend to view crime as an event that impacts the victim without their contribution or cooperation. The truth is that many crimes occur with little or no involvement from the victim. One can be injured, killed, robbed, or deceived, and their behavior may not influence or alter the final harmful outcome. In other cases, the relationship between the offender and the victim is superficial and general, based on common circumstances of life. Possessing money is undoubtedly related to robbery, just as beauty or youth are factors contributing to sexual assaults. In such cases, there is a certain mutual interaction between the perpetrator and the victim; however, this connection is not specific and, therefore, does not represent a relationship that can be changed or prevented (Hentig, 1940/41). The interconnection between the perpetrator and the victim, the murdered and the murderer, the deceived and the deceiver often goes unnoticed, despite being one of the most intriguing aspects of criminal behavior. Sociopathology has largely ignored this mutual dynamic, even though it reveals deep layers of human relationships. When temporary or permanent groupings form, the collision of these elements inevitably leads to the creation of new and often destructive combinations, which may provoke conflicts with severe consequences (Bjelajac, 2025, p. 152). This interaction can shape how crimes unfold, influencing victim selection, the method of execution, and the motives behind the act. Understanding these relationships not only contributes to better analysis of individual cases but also enables the development of more effective preventive measures in combating crime.

There is likely a corresponding relationship between predatory animals and their prey in the animal kingdom. The difference lies in the fact that the predator's traits are adapted to the weaknesses of its prey, whereas in many cases, the human victim actively tempts the perpetrator. A predator is—through various means—led to attack its prey. If there are born criminals, it is evident that there are also born victims, who harm and destroy themselves under the influence of an external intrusive factor (Hentig, 1940/41). This assertion sheds light on the controversial idea that the way an offender interacts with their victim reflects their motive and psychological traits. Caution is essential in analyzing this interaction, because while certain behavioral patterns may increase an individual's vulnerability, the responsibility for the crime remains solely on the offender. Shifting the burden of blame onto the victim can distort the understanding of crime and ignore societal factors and free will. However, the idea that certain individuals, consciously or unconsciously, attract crime through their behavior opens up a deeper analysis of the dynamics between criminals and victims, emphasizing the complexity of criminal behavior (Bjelajac, 2025, pp. 153-154). This perspective does not seek to shift responsibility onto victims but rather points to the need for a better understanding of risk factors and circumstances that may increase the likelihood of victimization.

The connection between the offender's and victim's behavior is evident in many crimes. Many pickpocketing techniques, for example, can only be applied to people with certain psychological responses (Hentig, 1940/41). Although criminals deliberately exploit their victims' vulnerabilities—demonstrating their skill and ability to manipulate situations—it is essential to recognize that: a lack of security awareness, an unsafe environment (Bjelajac, 2015), certain personality traits, carelessness, or an individual's behavior may increase the likelihood of becoming a target for theft, sexual assault, or fraud. This suggests that crime is not exclusively a one-sided act but a dynamic interaction between the offender and the victim, where the responsibility for the criminal act unequivocally remains on the offender.

In this context, victimologists provide several recommendations on optimal behavior in extreme situations. The status of a potential victim, their lifestyle, and specific behaviors in relation to victimological situations and conditions of interaction with a potential offender may encourage the emergence of criminal intent and antisocial thoughts in an individual's mind, as well as influence the offender's choice of crime execution method. At the same time, a potential victim's behavior may sometimes restrict the criminal's reaction, provoking empathy, fear, or hesitation. Furthermore, in each individual case, this depends on: the conditions, location, time, and other circumstances shaping the relationship between the offender and the victim. The personal characteristics of the potential victim, which have a significant impact on the nature of individual actions and behavior as a whole (Dzhuzha, 2017).

When describing the circumstances that contribute to the occurrence and development of a criminal act, it is important to consider the fact that the nature of the relationship between the victim, the offender, and other individuals connected to them at the time of the crime plays a significant role in the genesis of the offense. Such relationships can have either a positive or negative impact on the behavior of a potential victim. As a consequence, this can lead to the commission of a crime, but also to its prevention. Therefore, the analysis of such interactions should be utilized in determining victimological prevention measures, while simultaneously taking into account that the victim's behavior and everything leading up to the crime is inextricably linked to their personal characteristics, including personality, gender,

Figure 1. Classification Research for the Type of Relationship Between the Victim and the Offender

## Classification Model for the Type of Relationship Between the Victim and the Offender

It can be observed that gender and age of the victim were variables associated with the type of relationship between the victim and the offender. Considering the initial probabilities, the following was determined: the probability that they were acquaintances was 35%, that they were family members 19%, that they had some other type of relationship 6%, that they had no prior relationship 10%, and that they were in a romantic relationship, either in the past or present, 30%. These variables are considered to be linked to the type of relationship between the offender and the victim (except for the categories "other relationship" and "unknown person," which due to low frequency did not reach the minimum of 20 cases in the classification model). Specifically, when the victim is male and a minor, the probability that the offender is a family member increases from 19% to 71%, as opposed to the situation where the victim is a male over 18 years old, where the probability is higher (57%) that the offender is an acquaintance of the victim. On the other hand, when the victim is a woman aged between 18 and 64 years, the probability that the offender is her romantic partner or ex-partner increases from 30% to 69%.

(Pecino-Latorre et al., 2019)

age, profession, social, professional, and family status, etc. (Dzhuzha, 2017). For example, low self-control is a reason why offenders are at high risk of becoming crime victims (Schreck, 1999).

A positive individual impact should be directed at both participants in the criminal situation—toward the offender, to reduce the likelihood of recidivism, and toward the victim, to help them develop greater capacity for recognizing and avoiding risky situations. Resocialization and rehabilitation should not be viewed solely as post-offense measures but as key factors in preventing future criminal acts. An approach that equally analyzes both the offender and the victim enables a better understanding of criminal behavior and its causes, thereby contributing to more effective preventive measures. A criminal situation does not arise from isolated factors but is the result of the mutual interaction between individuals and the environment in which the crime takes place.

### Methods of approach and attack

The method of approach refers to the tactic used by the offender to initiate contact with the victim and create an opportunity to commit the crime. Analyzing this aspect provides valuable information about their abilities, including communication style, physical agility, and manipulation skills. The most common approach strategies include deception, where the offender gains the victim's trust through trickery, surprise, which involves an unexpected attack, and a blitz attack, in which violence occurs quickly and aggressively without prior interaction. These methods can be used independently or in combination, increasing the effectiveness of the attack and reducing the victim's chances of resistance.

Deception describes an offender who tricks the victim into believing a fabricated situation to lure them into a favorable position for the offender or to lower their guard, making the attack easier. One possible example of this type of behavior is an offender posing as a delivery worker or service technician to gain access to a home or another residential space. The character Buffalo Bill from *The Silence of the Lambs* used this method by pretending to have a broken arm, asking for help carrying furniture, and luring the victim into his van, where he overpowered her using physical force. Although this behavior was fictional in the movie, it was actually used by the serial killer Ted Bundy. Through psychology studies, Bundy learned that people are more likely to help someone with a physical disability, so he began wearing a fake arm cast to more easily lure victims (Petherick, n.d.).

The surprise method involves the offender stalking their victim from a hidden position and attacking quickly and unexpectedly. This approach often involves the attacker waiting for an opportune moment, such as when a car passes by or when the victim falls asleep before making their move. In some cases, the offender does not care about the presence of witnesses, which indicates their boldness or speed of execution. This method is often combined with a blitz attack, where everything happens within a very short period. For example, imagine a situation where an attacker hides in the bushes near a parking lot, waiting for a woman to approach her vehicle alone. As she stands next to her car, searching for her keys in her bag, the attacker silently approaches from behind, grabs her, and overpowers her before she even realizes what is happening (Bjelajac, 2025, p. 228). This method proves effective because the offender uses the element of surprise to prevent the victim from reacting in time, reducing their chances of escape or resistance.

The blitz attack method refers to a situation in which the offender uses sudden and intense force to quickly overpower the victim and take control of the situation. This approach relies on the element of surprise and rapid action, but it is problematic because it requires a significant use of physical force. For this reason, a blitz attack is often viewed more as an assault than as a method of approaching the victim. In many cases, a blitz attack follows the surprise method, where the offender ambushes the victim and then acts quickly and aggressively. For example, imagine an attacker waiting in a dark alley as a passerby approaches. As the victim walks past, the offender suddenly lunges forward, knocks them to the ground, and uses force to gain control. This style of attack focuses on speed and physical dominance to eliminate the victim's chances of resistance or escape. It is not always clear from the crime scene alone how the offender approached the victim, but witnesses or the victim, if they survived, can provide valuable information. An offender who successfully deceives a cautious person likely possesses good social skills, while one who overpowers a physically strong person is likely physically capable. On the other hand, a direct attack without verbal interaction may indicate poor social and communication skills (Bjelajac, 2025, p. 229). These insights enable profilers to analyze the offender's traits, define their profile, and narrow the pool of possible suspects.

The attack method defines the way the offender overpowers the victim after establishing contact. It may involve varying degrees of violence, ranging from verbal threats and psychological manipulation to severe physical assault or the use of weapons. It is important to note that approach and attack methods are not always directly connected—for example, if the offender encounters unexpected circumstances or if the victim resists in an unanticipated way. For this reason, it is necessary to analyze these two methods separately while also examining their relationship in order to gain a detailed insight into the dynamics of the crime and identify key behavioral patterns of the offender.

A crime committed by Jeffrey Dahmer provides a clear illustration of both the approach and attack methods. On May 20, 1991, Jeffrey Dahmer met Raymond Smith at Tavern 219. Dahmer approached him and offered him \$50 to return to his apartment for sex. This represents the approach method and is most accurately described as deception. Dahmer used a trick to lower the potential victim's defenses and persuade him to go with him to his apartment. When they arrived at around 3 AM, Smith stated that he would not stay long for just \$50, to which Dahmer asked him to stay overnight. Smith responded that it would cost much more, and Dahmer assured him that he would receive the rest of the money in the morning. Dahmer then went to the kitchen and prepared a drink laced with alcohol and sleeping pills. Within half an hour, Smith was unconscious, at which point Dahmer strangled him on the floor. Although the victim was unconscious, this act still constitutes an attack and, in this case, is best described as a blitz attack (Petherick, n.d.).

The attack method is crucial for understanding the capabilities and behavior of offenders in a given environment and with a specific victim, which has significant implications for the safety of future victims. For example, an analysis of approach and attack methods may reveal that some offenders hesitate to use force and are concerned about their victims' well-being, suggesting that future victims may not be in serious danger. On the other hand, another offender's progressive escalation of force and risk, including the use of weapons, may indicate an increased danger for future victims (Bjelajac, 2025, p. 231). Analyzing these patterns allows for better recognition of the methods offenders use, which can significantly contribute to identifying and narrowing down the pool of suspects. Understanding their behavior is not only crucial for solving specific cases but also for developing strategies that can reduce the likelihood of similar crimes recurring. Based on these insights, preventive measures, such as enhanced security in high-risk areas or educating potential victims, can be more effective in preventing future attacks.

### **Risk assessment**

Questions are often asked: Did the victims consciously or unconsciously take a risk that put them in danger? For example, were they traveling alone, especially late at night, when there was a lower chance of witnesses being present? Were they frequenting entertainment venues and consuming large amounts of alcohol, which could have made them more vulnerable to an attack? Or did they perhaps display behavioral patterns that made them targets, such as routine walks or activities in isolated places? The routines and habits of the victim often play a key role in how the offender identifies, tracks, and ultimately attacks them. The places they regularly visited and the ways they moved through their daily lives can indicate how they came into contact with their attacker. Crime scene reconstruction provides crucial insights into what happened and helps investigators identify the offender's motive as well as narrow down the pool of suspects. The victim's reaction to the attack can also provide important information. Were they surprised and passive, or did they attempt to resist? Could there be signs of a struggle indicating that the victim and attacker knew each other? These questions open the space for a thorough analysis, and every detail can contribute to piecing together the broader picture of the crime (Bjelajac, 2025, pp. 231-233). By combining precise investigative techniques and systematic evidence collection, it is possible to determine the key facts that led to the tragic events. A thorough analysis of all available information enables the reconstruction of the sequence of events and the identification of factors that contributed to the crime, increasing the likelihood of its resolution.

Risk assessment involves determining the probability that a particular person will become a victim of a crime. Occasionally, we hear reports of violent crimes where the offender went to great lengths to find a victim. In other cases, we hear that the offender took advantage of an opportunity victim. In this latter case, something the victim did or was involved in may have increased their risk of becoming a victim of that crime. This does not mean that the individual is in any way responsible for becoming a victim, but rather that certain factors, such as lifestyle or circumstances, increased their chances of victimization. This can include activities such as prostitution, excessive drinking, drug use, or traveling alone late at night in areas known for crime. Risk assessment may also include an analysis of the risk the offender was willing to take to reach the victim, known as offender risk assessment (Petherick, n.d.). The assessment of the risks taken by the offender involves analyzing their actions in relation to the dangers they were willing to accept, such as the choice of time and place of the crime, the presence of potential

witnesses, and strategies for concealing evidence. For example, a crime committed in a busy area or under surveillance cameras indicates a different level of boldness and impulsivity compared to an act carried out in an isolated location. This assessment allows for a better understanding of the degree of planning, motivation, and psychological profile of the offender, which are key elements for criminal profiling and the effective direction of an investigation.

Figure 2. Illustrative Example of the Simulated Case of Marija B.

<b>Victim Profiling – The Case of Marija B.</b>	
<b>Basic Information about the Victim</b>	<p><b>Name and Age:</b> Marija B., 25 years old</p> <p><b>Occupation:</b> Sales manager at a local trading company</p> <p><b>Marital Status:</b> In a relationship, no children</p> <p><b>Place of Residence:</b> Apartment in a high-traffic urban area</p> <p><b>Social Life:</b> Active on social media, posts explicit content, frequently visits local cafés, and participates in recreational activities</p>
<b>Victim’s Routines and Habits</b>	<p>Marija is known for her consistent daily schedule. Every morning, she leaves for work at the same time, taking the same route through the city center. After work, she often goes for drinks with friends or to the gym. On weekends, she enjoys hiking or cycling near the city. On social media, she regularly posts provocative photos, her locations, and activities, which may have allowed a potential attacker to track her habits.</p>
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	<p><b>Time of the Attack:</b> The attack occurred in the <b>evening hours</b>, while Marija was walking home after visiting a local café.</p> <p><b>Exposure to Risk:</b> Her decision to <b>walk home alone through poorly lit streets</b> increased her vulnerability. Additionally, <b>posting her location on social media</b> may have allowed the attacker to predict her movements.</p>
<b>Psychological Profile of the Victim</b>	<p>Marija is described as a social and communicative person. She prefers short and tight dresses. Her openness and habit of sharing details about her life make her an easy target for manipulation or stalking. Furthermore, due to her optimistic outlook on life, she may not have noticed potential warning signs before the attack.</p>
<b>Incident Analysis</b>	<p>The attack occurred near her home, in an area known for low police presence and poor lighting. The investigation revealed that the attacker was likely familiar with Marija’s routines, suggesting that the crime was premeditated. Traces of a struggle were found at the crime scene, indicating that she attempted to resist.</p>
<b>Commentary</b>	<p>The victim’s profile indicates that her habits and routines played a key role in her selection as a target. Posting explicit and provocative content on social media, along with choosing unsafe routes, increased her risk. This case highlights the importance of awareness regarding personal safety, especially for individuals with a public presence on social media and predictable routines.</p>
<b>Prevention Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid posting revealing photos, personal details, and real-time locations.</li> <li>• Use well-lit and busy routes, especially in the evening.</li> <li>• Consider carrying a personal alarm or another self-defense tool.</li> <li>• Educate yourself on recognizing potential risks and improve awareness of personal safety.</li> </ul>

(Bjelajac, 2025, p. 234)

The risk level of a victim can be divided into three primary categories: low risk, medium risk, and high risk. These levels refer to the degree of likelihood that an individual will suffer harm due to their personal, professional, and social life. For example, a person at high risk of victimization could be a prostitute, as she is often exposed to a large number of strangers, may travel alone late at night, is frequently in contact with drugs or drug users, may be a lower priority for law enforcement if attacked or murdered, and is less likely to be noticed after an incident due to social marginalization. A low-risk victim, on the other hand, might be someone with a stable job, a strong social network, rarely travels alone, and does not have a predictable travel schedule. There are many factors that contribute to an individual's risk, and the examples provided are just a few of them (Petherick, n.d.). As indicated, in addition to individual characteristics, environmental factors such as place of residence, frequency of visits to high-risk areas, and the presence of community support also play a crucial role in determining a victim's level of exposure to potential crimes.

Accordingly, the data support the hypothesis that general deviance and violent criminal behavior can be considered a type of lifestyle that increases the risk of victimization and that the structural constraint of residential proximity to crime affects victimization independently of lifestyle and individual-level demographic factors (Sampson & Lauritsen, 1990). The victim's lifestyle risk refers to the overall exposure of an individual to criminal activities, depending on their personal traits, life habits, and social environment. This risk is significantly influenced by how a person makes decisions, responds to stressful situations, and adapts to potentially dangerous circumstances. There are certain factors that can increase this risk, including:

- **Aggressiveness** – Individuals who frequently exhibit aggressive behavior may find themselves in risky situations as they provoke conflicts and become targets for retaliation.
- **Anger** – Uncontrolled outbursts of anger can lead to impulsive decisions and situations that increase the victim's vulnerability, especially in social and professional environments.
- **Emotional outbursts** – Sudden and intense displays of emotion can attract the attention of manipulators and individuals with criminal intent.
- **Hyperactivity** – Individuals with hyperactive behavior may be prone to reckless decisions and neglecting potential dangers.
- **Impulsivity** – Making sudden decisions without assessing the consequences can lead to exposure to dangerous situations, whether through risky relationships or reckless actions.
- **Anxiety** – People who are frequently anxious may struggle to make rational decisions in crisis situations, increasing the likelihood of becoming victims of manipulation.
- **Passivity** – A lack of self-confidence and a tendency to withdraw from conflicts can make a person an easy target for abuse or exploitation.
- **Low self-esteem** – Individuals with a poor self-image often enter toxic relationships and fail to recognize the risky situations they are in.
- **Emotional withdrawal** – People who avoid social interactions or do not express their emotions may have difficulty communicating in situations where seeking help is necessary.
- **Unpredictable behavior** – Sudden and frequent shifts between different emotional states can create confusion for others and make it harder to identify problems in time.

- **Tendency toward risky situations** – Individuals who frequently enter unfamiliar or dangerous environments, whether out of curiosity or excitement, increase their chances of becoming victims of criminal activities.

## Discussion and concluding considerations

In modern society, threats to human security are becoming increasingly complex and subtle, making every individual a potential victim (Bjelajac, 2017; Wambugu, Kavivya, & Handa, 2024). From the heightened vulnerability of women and children experiencing domestic violence (Youngson, et al., 2021; Bjelajac & Merdović, 2019a), the widespread use of narcotic drugs (Bjelajac, Matijašević & Počuča, 2012), and abuses on the internet (Bjelajac & Jovanović, 2013; Bjelajac & Filipović, 2020; Bjelajac & Merdović, 2019b) to the manipulative activities of religious movements (Zirojević & Bjelajac, 2013), risk factors continuously evolve and adapt to new circumstances. Anyone can fall victim to crime, whether it be an armed robbery, home burglary, theft of personal belongings, carjacking, sexual assault, or, in the worst case, murder. Cybercrime and grand corruption (including state capture) are other realities of the modern age, but in the end, no one is immune to crime (Geldenhuys, 2022). Human rights, which should serve as the foundation for individual protection, are often violated precisely where security should be guaranteed – in families, schools, and digital spaces. The key to countering these threats lies in preventive action, raising awareness, and strengthening institutional protection mechanisms, as only a society that actively recognizes and responds to these challenges can ensure the safety of its most vulnerable members.

The analysis of victims in the process of criminal profiling is often overlooked in comparison to the focus on offenders. However, comprehensive victim profiling provides crucial insights into crime dynamics, attacker motives, and patterns of victimization. This approach not only enables more effective case resolution but also enhances preventive strategies that can reduce the risk of future incidents. One of the main conclusions of the research is that criminals often deliberately choose their victims based on their characteristics, routines, and social context. This means that analyzing the victim's lifestyle, professional environment, personal habits, and previous interactions can significantly contribute to investigations. For example, recurring behavioral patterns, such as established movement routes or presence in certain high-risk environments, can help predict and prevent future attacks.

Additionally, victimological profiles enable investigators to examine the psychological and emotional factors that influence potential victims. Individuals who exhibit low self-confidence, anxiety, or impulsivity are often more susceptible to manipulation and attacks, as offenders perceive them as easier targets. These aspects are particularly important in cases of serial crimes, where offenders tend to carefully select victims who fit their specific needs and motives. In this context, risk assessment plays a crucial role in analyzing victimization. By categorizing individuals into low, medium, and high-risk groups, it becomes possible to identify those who are particularly vulnerable and implement targeted protective measures. For example, individuals who work at night, frequently travel alone, or have a strong presence on social media may be more susceptible to criminal attacks, necessitating specialized preventive strategies.

The interaction between the offender and the victim also plays a decisive role in understanding criminal acts. In many cases, the victim is not merely a passive participant but part of a complex dynamic that precedes the crime. While this does not in any way imply victim-blaming, understanding how an

offender establishes contact, manipulates, or prepares a victim can help identify patterns that lead to criminal acts.

The significance of victim profiling is also reflected in judicial proceedings, where precise analysis can contribute to a more accurate reconstruction of events and the determination of the offender's responsibility. For example, by analyzing previous interactions between the victim and the suspect, as well as their social and professional relationships, it is possible to establish motives and the method of committing the crime.

Introducing a systematic approach to victim profiling not only improves investigations but also has broad implications for the prevention and protection of at-risk individuals. The integration of modern data analysis methods, digital tracking, and psychological models can aid in the early identification of risks and the prevention of serious crimes. In this regard, a multidisciplinary approach involving criminologists, psychologists, sociologists, and data analysts is a key tool in the fight against crime and the protection of potential victims.

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## Profilisanje žrtava

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### Sažetak

Ovaj rad se bavi analizom žrtava u procesu kriminalističkog profilisanja, s posebnim osvrtom na ulogu njihovih karakteristika u odabiru od strane počinitelja. Cilj istraživanja je da se identifikuju ključni elementi viktimoških profila i proceni kako socijalni, psihološki i bihevioralni faktori utiču na verovatnoću postajanja žrtvom. Istraživačka pitanja uključuju: Koji faktori doprinose izboru određene žrtve? Kako način života i rutina utiču na rizik viktimizacije? Na koji način analiza žrtve može doprineti otkrivanju počinioca i sprečavanju budućih zločina? Osnovna hipoteza rada je da postoji jasna veza između osobina žrtve, načina njenog života i rizika od viktimizacije. Pretpostavlja se da kriminalci ciljano biraju žrtve na osnovu njihovih ranjivosti, rutina i društvenih karakteristika, te da analiza ovih faktora može doprineti efikasnijem rešavanju zločina i boljoj prevenciji. Istraživanje se oslanja na deduktivnu i induktivnu analizu podataka iz dostupnih studija, pravnih dokumenata i statističkih podataka o kriminalnim delima. Koriste se metode viktimoške analize, analiza slučajeva i komparativna analiza postojećih modela profilisanja žrtava.

*Ključne reči:* profilisanje žrtava, viktimologija, kriminalističko profilisanje, interakcija sa žrtvom, metoda pristupa, metoda napada, procena rizika.