

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/lets-not-traumatize-crime-victims-twice>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

For victims of violent crime, what are the routes to emotional and mental health? At Vera, where we have long been involved in improving the outcomes for crime victims, a recent review of the research evidence has shown that a guilty verdict against the perpetrator is no cure-all for the harmed person.

I recently co-authored [a review of the literature on positive and negative outcomes for victims involved in the criminal justice system](#) and found that the adversarial nature of most criminal court proceedings tends to leave victims feeling alienated, confused, and unsafe. You could say that many view their contact with the justice system as traumatic, rather than cathartic. Because crime victims continue to be an underserved group, the Vera Institute has recently launched its [Center on Victimization and Safety \(CVS\)](#), which will study, evaluate, and share best practices in victims services and the criminal justice system.

Meanwhile, my review of the existing research has revealed that what helps victims to heal is a sense that the process itself is transparent and fair, allowing them to have their say about their traumatic experience what is known as procedural justice. Some studies show that in cases of domestic violence, victim participation in court proceedings and procedural justice is linked to a lower incidence of subsequent victimization by the abuser. Practices that may promote a sense of procedural justice and warrant a closer look include victim advocacy services and the opportunity for victims to submit personal statements about their experience to the court.

Pilot projects in participatory justice, notably Vera's [Common Justice Project](#), are exploring alternatives to the traditional court process and merit serious evaluation.

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