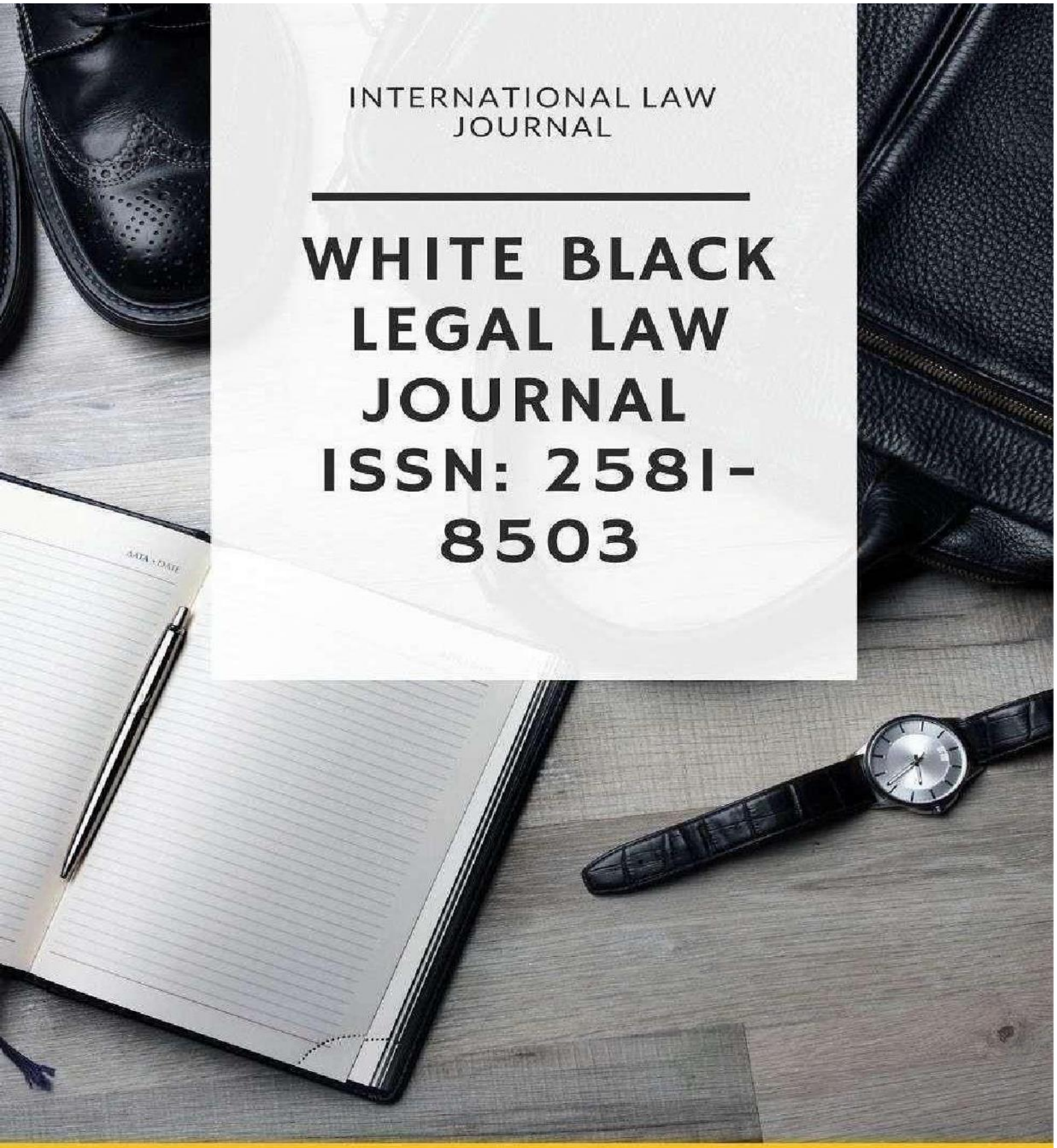


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VICTIMOLOGY AS A FOUN DATION OF OFFENDER PROFILING: ASSESSING THE ROLE OF VICTIM CHARACTERISTICS IN BEHAVIOURAL INVESTIGATION IN INDIA

AUTHORED BY - RAMYA S

Abstract:

Offender profiling is usually pictured as the study of the offender's mind. Good behavioural investigation tends to start somewhere else, with the victim. Victimology asks who the victim was, how they were connected to the offender, how the victimisation happened, and which risks, routines and vulnerabilities may have influenced the offender's choice of target and conduct. This article examines how victim characteristics are used in behavioural investigation in India. Its central claim is that victim analysis is an investigative method and has nothing to do with shifting blame onto victims. Done properly, it narrows the pool of suspects, helps reconstruct the offender's decisions, and separates planned offending from opportunistic offending. The discussion draws on the Indian legal and institutional setting, including the victim-oriented provisions of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, the National Crime Records Bureau's figures for 2023, and decisions of the Supreme Court. It closes by identifying the evidentiary, ethical and institutional obstacles that keep forensic victimology at the margins of Indian investigative practice.

Keywords: victimology, offender profiling, behavioural investigation, victim characteristics

I. INTRODUCTION

The Offender is focused traditionally on the study of crime; Criminal conduct is the underlying factor for the circumstances surrounding the commission of an offence and the legal consequences. A thorough understanding of criminal behaviour calls for an examination of the victim and the circumstances that lead to their interaction with the offender. This approach serves as the basis of victimology, a field within criminology that explores the process of victimization, the characters and traits of victims, the interactions between victims and offenders, and the social and situational circumstances linked to criminal activities.

Victimology has over the course of time developed beyond the examination of the consequences of crime and has attained significance in understanding the circumstances in which offences occur and the behavioural patterns that may facilitate criminal investigations.

Victimology gives rise to offender profiling by analysing the victim's age, gender, occupation, lifestyle, social relationships and circumstances embracing the offence. These attributes may help investigators comprehend victim selection, the feasible relationship between the victim and offender, and the of the essence criminal act. Such examination furnishes useful investigative brings out and reinforce the revival of criminal events.

Offender profiling involves examining crime scene evidence, behavioural patterns, and information related to the victim to identify potential characteristics and traits of an unknown offender. In the Indian context, this approach also needs to take into account the country's diverse social and cultural landscape, particularly factors such as gender, caste, economic status, and geographical background. However, the characteristics of a victim alone are not enough to establish an offender’s identity or motive. Such information must be supported by forensic findings and other relevant evidence.

Contrary to this background, the present research explores victimology as a framework of offender profiling, predominantly the role of victim characteristics in behavioural investigation in India. It appraises the importance of victim related information in comprehension criminal behaviour, ascertaining investigative leads and assessing victim offender relationships, while also dealing with the limitations and ethical aspects associated with criminal profiling.

II. CONCEPTUALISING VICTIMOLOGY IN CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION

Victimology is the standardised study of victims, victimisation and the contextual factors associated with criminal acts. It scrutinises the relationship between victims and offenders, the determinants contributing to victimisation and the influence of crime on individuals and society. In criminal investigation, victimology shifts attention exceeding the offender by considering the victim's background, personal circumstances, lifestyle and social environment. This provides investigators with a extensive understanding of the events underlying an offence. The Implementation of victimology encompasses considering the victim's age, gender,

occupation, daily activities, personal relationships and progression before the commission of an offence. Such information may facilitate investigators in comprehend the process of victim selection, identifying potential motives and ascertaining whether the victim was consciously targeted or selected due to specific circumstances. It also contributes to the restoration of criminal events and the evolutionary process of investigative leads when examined in combination with physical, forensic and digital evidence.

In the criminal justice system of India, victimology is significantly relevant because victimisation may be moulded by various social, economic and geographical circumstances. Conversely, victim characteristics must be interpreted objectively without relying on stereotypes or conjectures. Therefore, victimology serves as an important investigative provide assistance in conceptualisation of criminal behaviour and developing possible offender profiles, instead of laying the ground work for the identity or intentions of an offender.

Furthermore, victimology stimulates a victim centred research method to criminal investigation by acknowledging the importance of the victim's experiences, rights and dignity across the investigative process. It helps investigators avoid bypassing relevant circumstances and ensures that victim related information is gathered and interpreted with proper consideration. By integrating victimological approaches into behavioural analysis, investigators can develop a more comprehensive recognition of criminal incidents and improve the productivity of investigative procedures.

III. VICTIM CHARACTERISTICS AS INVESTIGATIVE EVIDENCE

Victim characteristics play a crucial role in criminal investigation by furnishing information about the circumstances contextual to an offence. Reviewing the victim's personal background, lifestyle and social environment may aid investigators grasp the process of victim selection, identify possible motives and develop pertinent investigative leads.

The predominant victim characteristics considered during criminal investigation include:

1. **Demographic profiles**: These characteristics perhaps help investigators examine tendencies of victimisation and understand the circumstances surrounding victim selection.
2. **Professional and personal attributes**: The victim's profession, daily routine and personal habits may provide information about their movements and possible

confrontation to particular situations.

3. **Family dynamics and social interactions**: Reviewing family connections, friendships and professional relationships may help identify possible affiliations between the victim and the offender.
4. **Economic profile**: Financial circumstances, property ownership and economic activities may provide pertinent information when investigating offences constituting financial motives.
5. **Spatial and environment conditions**: The victim's residential location, workplace and often visited places may help investigators recognise the circumstances and location of the offence.
6. **Behavioural characteristics**: The victim's habits, communication patterns and activities before the incident may assist in reformulate the events prior to the crime.

Importance in behavioural investigation

The examination of these characteristics may provide assistance investigators in:

- Identifying feasible patterns of victim selection.
- Understanding the relationship across the victim and the offender.
- Determining whether the victim was with deliberate intent targeted or selected conveniently.
- Developing possible investigative leads and detecting potential suspects.
- Reconstructing the contextual factors and sequence of criminal events.

However, victim characteristics cannot independently establish the determine or intention of an offender. They must be examined without prejudice and corroborated with forensic findings, witness statements, digital records and other pertinent evidence. In the context of India, particular care must also be taken to evade inferences based on social stereotypes, caste, gender or economic background.

IV. VICTIMOLOGY AND OFFENDER PROFILING

Victimology and offender behavioural assessment are closely interrelated fields of criminal investigation, as the examination of victim related information can provide valuable insights into the behaviour and possible characteristics of an unrecognised offender. Offender behavioural assessment involves the standardised analysis of crime scene evidence, the nature of criminal conduct, victim selection and the circumstances prevailing an offence to develop

investigative postulations about the offender. Victimology contributes to this process by scrutinising the victim's personal background, lifestyle, social relationships and circumstances before and during the conduct of the crime. Such observation helps investigators understand the interaction between the victim and the offender and identify behavioural patterns that may otherwise remain unperceived.

The Association between victimology and offender profiling can be understood through the following particulars:

1. **Identification of potential victims:** Evaluating the victim's age, gender, occupation, lifestyle and daily activities may help investigators perceive the underpinning on which an offender selects a specific individual. It may point out whether the victim was deliberately targeted, selected due to personal nexus or confronted through an available opportunity.
2. **Dynamics of victim-offender relations:** Analysing the victim's family connections, friendships, professional associations and personal disputes may help investigators determine whether the offender was previously known to the victim. This examination can provide useful leads regarding possible suspects and the circumstances preceding the offence.
3. **Behavioural Tendencies:** The victim's daily routine, movements, communication habits and frequently visited locations may help investigators identify patterns that could have been observed or exploited by the offender. Such information may also assist in understanding how the offender approached the victim and gained access to them.
4. **Forensic reconstruction of criminal events:** The nature of injuries, position of the victim, location of the incident and surrounding circumstances may provide information about the interaction between the victim and the offender. When examined alongside forensic findings, these details can assist in reconstructing the possible sequence of events.
5. **Examination of underlying motives:** Information regarding the victim's financial circumstances, personal relationships, professional activities and previous conflicts may help investigators examine possible motives behind the offence. These may include financial gain, personal disputes, revenge or other forms of hostility. However, such possibilities require independent verification.

6. **Environmental and Spatial Analysis:** Examining the victim's residential location, workplace, travel routes and frequently visited places may help investigators understand the geographical circumstances of victimisation. This information may assist in identifying possible areas of offender activity and examining whether the offence occurred within a familiar or unfamiliar environment.
7. **Comprehending Criminal conduct:** The manner in which an offender approaches, controls, injures or interacts with a victim may provide behavioural information about the criminal incident. Examining these circumstances may help investigators develop hypotheses concerning the offender's possible level of planning, familiarity with the victim and method of operation.

Substantiality in behavioural investigation

The integration of victimological information into offender profiling enables investigators to develop a more comprehensive understanding of criminal incidents. It assists in connecting victim-related circumstances with crime-scene behaviour, identifying possible investigative leads and examining similarities between offences. In cases involving repeated criminal activity, comparisons of victim characteristics and methods of victim selection may also help investigators identify similarities across incidents.

In the Indian context, the application of victimology in offender profiling requires consideration of the country's diverse social, cultural and economic conditions. Factors such as gender, age, caste, occupation and geographical background may provide relevant investigative context, but they must not be treated as independent indicators of criminal behaviour or offender identity. Victim-related information should be assessed objectively and supported by forensic evidence, witness statements, digital records and other reliable investigative materials. Therefore, victimology serves as an important foundation for developing evidence-based offender profiles while maintaining fairness, objectivity and respect for the dignity of victims.

V. THE INDIAN CONTEXT

A. Investigative relevance in India

Behavioural investigation in India faces conditions of its own. The population is vast and varied, reporting rates differ by gender, class, caste, region and type of offence, and many victims come under social, economic or family pressure not to file a formal complaint. Victim characteristics have to be read with that context in mind.

Caste, gender, class, religion, migration status and disability can affect both a person's exposure to crime and the way institutions respond when it happens. A migrant worker who goes missing may not be reported for days, because the job is insecure or there is no family nearby to raise the alarm. A woman experiencing domestic violence may stay in the home because she depends on it financially or fears the stigma of leaving. Someone from a marginalised community may distrust the police after earlier experiences of discrimination. None of these changes the legal definition of the offence. It does change, quite substantially, how investigators ought to gather and interpret information about the victim.

This is where forensic victimology earns its place in India. It pushes investigators to understand the social world in which the offence happened, rather than leaning on confessions or on stereotypes.

B. The scale and pattern of victimisation

The numbers make the case for victim-centred investigation plain. The National Crime Records Bureau's Crime in India 2023 report records 4,48,211 cases of crime against women registered across the country, a rise of 0.7 per cent over 2022.[10] The largest single category was cruelty by husbands or relatives, with 1,33,676 cases, close to 30 per cent of the total.[11] Much of the crime against women, in other words, takes place inside the home and the family, far from the anonymous public spaces that dominate popular images of violent crime.

Crime against children rose faster. The report records 1,77,335 such cases in 2023, 9.2 per cent more than in 2022. Kidnapping and abduction accounted for 79,884 of them, and offences under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 for another 67,694. For victimology the significance is clear. A large part of recorded victimisation involves people whose age, dependence, family setting and limited freedom of movement are central to what happened to them. In offences against children, how the offender gained access, whether through the neighbourhood, the school, the family, a transport route or online contact, often tells investigators more than the offender's demographic profile.

Cybercrime shows why victimology now has to extend to digital life. The NCRB registered 86,420 cybercrime cases in 2023, an increase of 31.2 per cent on the previous year, covering offences in which a communication device is either the medium or the target. In these cases the victim's online activity, privacy settings, contacts, financial transactions and messages can show how the offender found, approached, deceived or extorted them. Here too the analysis should concentrate on the offender's access and manipulation and stay clear of moral judgments about the victim's digital life.

Trafficking figures tell a similar story about vulnerability. Cases under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 rose from 1,497 in 2022 to 2,166 in 2023. Trafficking investigations call for close attention to how victims were recruited, what false promises of work or marriage were made, who held their documents, whether debt bondage was involved, how they were moved and what their economic situation was. These are victimological variables, yet each one leads investigators towards the network behind the offence and its methods of coercion.

C. Legal developments and victim centred procedure

Indian criminal procedure has moved, slowly but steadily, towards treating victims as participants in the process instead of as passive witnesses. The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS) carries forward and strengthens this victim orientation, with provisions on compensation, medical treatment, protection and participation.

Section 396 of the BNSS requires every State Government, in coordination with the Central Government, to frame a scheme for compensating victims or their dependants who have suffered loss or injury and need rehabilitation. Section 176(3) goes further on the evidentiary side. For offences punishable with seven years' imprisonment or more, it requires the officer in charge of a police station to have a forensic expert visit the crime scene and collect evidence, with the process videographed, from a date each State is to notify within five years.[18] Once fully in force, this should give victim-centred behavioural analysis a much firmer evidentiary base.

Why does this matter for profiling? Because the quality of information available to investigators depends heavily on how victims are treated. A victim who is protected, given medical care, told about their rights and allowed to take part in the process is far more likely to give a reliable account, and the evidence and social context of the offence are more likely to be preserved.

The courts have moved in the same direction, gradually ceasing to treat victims merely as sources of evidence and recognising them as holders of rights within the criminal process. In Delhi Domestic Working Women's Forum v. Union of India, the Supreme Court stressed that victims of sexual violence need legal assistance, medical care and compensation. In Chairman, Railway Board v. Chandrima Das, it held the State liable to compensate a rape victim, treating the assault as a violation of fundamental rights and not simply a private wrong. Both decisions fit the premise of forensic victimology. An investigation is adequate only if, along with the offender's act, it takes account of the victim's safety, trauma, access to justice and ongoing vulnerability.

D. Institutional limitations

For all these developments, the use of victimology in Indian policing is still patchy. Many police units have no trained behavioural analysts, forensic psychologists or victim support officers, and no structured system for reviewing cases. Investigations still tend to rely on confessions, physical evidence and eyewitnesses far more than on any reconstruction of behaviour.

Misuse is a further risk. Victim characteristics can be filtered through gendered, casteist or moralising assumptions. A victim's clothing, drinking, sexual history, late-night movements or choice of partner may be wrongly treated as bearing on consent or credibility. That line of reasoning cannot be defended in law or in ethics. Victimology has to rest on evidence, never on prejudice.

VI. CONCLUSION

Victimology belongs at the centre of criminal investigation. Looking carefully at the victim helps investigators understand how a target was chosen, how the offender gained access, what behavioural patterns are present, how much risk the victim faced and what social context surrounded the offence. In India, where so much serious crime takes place within relationships of trust, dependence or proximity, the approach can make investigations considerably more accurate.

The NCRB's figures for 2023 show that offences against women and children, cybercrime and trafficking make up a large part of India's recorded crime. Each of these categories calls for investigative methods that take seriously the victim's routines, relationships, dependence, digital exposure and vulnerability. Victimology must also stay evidence-based, ethical and trauma-informed. Its job is to explain what the offender did, and it should never become a means of blaming the victim.

As Indian criminal procedure becomes more victim-centred, forensic victimology can link three things that are too often kept apart: the rights of victims, scientific methods of investigation and effective offender profiling. A justice system that claims to take victims seriously has to take their circumstances seriously as well, treating them as evidence that helps establish the truth and never as grounds for judging the victim.

In the Indian context, greater awareness and institutional development are required to

strengthen the practical application of victimology. Adequate victim-support services, effective investigation, witness protection, legal assistance and rehabilitation measures are essential for ensuring that victims receive appropriate treatment within the criminal justice system. The focus should extend beyond identifying offenders to also addressing the difficulties experienced by victims after the commission of an offence.

Finally, victimology and offender profiling should be understood as complementary approaches that contribute to a more scientific, humane and effective criminal justice system. While offender profiling assists in understanding possible patterns of criminal behaviour, victimology ensures that the experiences, circumstances and rights of victims are not overlooked. Their combined application can strengthen investigative practices, support crime prevention and promote a justice system that gives equal importance to establishing the truth, holding offenders accountable and protecting victims.

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