

Combating the Rise of Violent Victimitizations

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Background: Crime is a harsh reality of the world that everyone has to deal with in some way throughout their life. While I personally have been lucky enough to not experience any direct crime in my lifetime, I have many friends that have been victimized by violent crime in the past. While we as a society make efforts to reduce these events through police patrols, informative strategies for prevention, and self-defense measures, more and more of these crimes are taking place every day.

Of course the hope would be that the numbers of crimes that take place each year would be going down, but unfortunately that is not the case. While it is true that there was a whopping 62% decrease in criminal victimization from the years of 1994-2015, the trend has since changed direction with a 22% increase from 2015-2018. These numbers take into account the “increases in the number of victims of rape or sexual assault, aggravated assault (assault with a weapon), and simple assault (assault without a weapon). It’s also important to note that those numbers alone only discuss the number of individual victims and not the total number of violent crimes experienced. These estimates “rose from 5.0 million in 2015 to 6.4 million in 2018” which results in a 28% increase for all violent victimizations. The final, and possibly most concerning statistic divulged is the rate at which crimes have been reported in recent years. In the span of 2015 to 2018, ‘the rate of violent victimizations not reported to police rose from 9.5 to 12.9 per 1000 persons age 12 or older while the rate being reported to police showed no statically significant change.’”

Another particular aspect to note when looking at the crime statistics is to see who is being targeted. For the first time in many years a higher proportion of the male population are experiencing violent victimizations than the proportion of females,

though this difference is fairly minute. Conversely, when looking at rape and sexual assault separately from the other classifications of violent crime, 91% of victims are female and only 9% are male. In conjunction these statistics show that while men are targeted slightly more in general, women are significantly more likely to experience violence of a sexual nature.

Across the board experts agree that the best method for self defense is avoidance of the situation all together. Common strategies include traveling together with others, staying in well lit areas, and keeping aware of your surroundings, but of course these methods are not always effective. In the event that you do find yourself in a dangerous situation that you can't escape from the general consensus is to fight back with all you can. One expert named Lori Hartman Gervasi, author of *Fight Like a Girl - and Win: Defense Decisions for Women* and karate black-belt, states that "most attackers are looking for an easy victim - and the more you fight back, the more likely it is that he'll give up and run away.

In terms of needing to actually defend yourself there are a few different products available on the market. Recently gadgets.com updated a review list of "17 best self defense products to stop and assailant" containing a variety of tasers, stun guns, pepper sprays, and gels, and alarms. The primary problem with many of these items is due to the nature of them being weapons, minus the alarms, many events and locations will not allow you to carry them on your person. Items that are disguised are often still fairly conspicuous looking which could cause more problems in the event of a bag search. Also, the alarms available come in a variety of sensitivities and volumes leaving the most effective ones to be accidentally triggered and some of the quieter ones rendered useless when no one is in range to hear it. Finally, these items are only useful assuming people have the chance to react. Many people carry these defense items on or in bags/purses where they can be hard to find or manage in stressful, fast paced situations.

Problem: Violent crime is on the rise and people need to be able to protect themselves. In these high stress moments victims need to juggle their flight or fight response, contacting police, and/or reaching for a self-defense item. Also, traditional self-defense items, while fairly effective, can often bar individuals from common social activities rendering them more of a hinderance than help in certain situations.

Hypothesis: By solving issues of timely authority notification, ease of use, accessibility, and product concealability, individuals will be able to live their lives with a greater sense of comfort, security, and overall perception of safety.

Methodology: The primary goal of my research is to understand what different individuals use to help them feel safe. I would also like to understand the underlying psychology of the perception of safety. Finally, I wish to receive feedback on current products in the market and collect commonly experience problems from actual users.

I intend to begin my research by observing the habits of close friends and peers in terms of self protection. This will include what products they carry with them as well as behaviors they use to stay aware of their surroundings. Beyond observational research, I plan on conducting both online surveys spread through social media as well as in-person interviews. In terms of interviews, I plan on reaching out to college students, multiple police departments (campus and local), self defense experts, the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center, and a psychologist. The goal of the survey and interviews is to further understand what tactics and items people carry / utilize to keep themselves safe in various public settings.

The final step for my research is to perform a market analysis to identify the scope of existing products aimed to solved the identified problems. I plan to sort through a large variety of online retailers while noting stand-out reviews on different products. I also intend to research products that are specifically recommended by police officers. Lastly I will identify current style trends in the world of fashion and accessories to draw inspiration that will influence the final product styling.