

# Do Victim Impact Statements Predict the Likelihood of an Offender Expressing Remorse, Issuing an Apology, or Taking Responsibility?

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# Victim Impact Statements

- Victims may use victim impact statements to assist them in reaching their goals during offender sentencings
- What is a victim impact statement? (VIS)
  - Allows victims to communicate their experiences to the judge, the offender, and the wider community (Booth, 2014)
  - Restorative qualities (Booth, 2014)
  - The most common delivery methods of VIS are written and oral statements (De Mesmaecker, 2012)

# VIS and Sentencing

- Some victims believe their VIS will influence sentencing (De Mesmaecker, 2012).
- A recent Canadian study of sentencing rulings found no VIS – sentencing relationship (Dufour et al, 2023).



**What is the  
relationship between  
VIS and offender –  
related outcomes?**

# Variables

## Remorse

- Acknowledgment of the stress and turmoil caused and taking personal responsibility for the pain inflicted on the victim (Hola et al., 2018).
- May encourage offenders to make amends and apologize for the wrongdoings they have committed (Hola et al., 2018).

## Apology

- A social action that signifies to the victim and society that the offender recognizes their wrongdoings (Proeve, 2023).

- Many victims view an apology from the offender as one of the most important outcomes of the court proceeding (Bonwsteffen & Giebels, 2020).

## Responsibility

- Victims perceive offenders as intending to repair harm when they demonstrate sufficient responsibility (Bonwsteffen & Giebels, 2020)
- The offender should make sincere efforts to make amends, fix broken relationships, and repair the harm caused (Choi & Severson, 2009).



# Research Questions

## QUESTION 1

What is the relationship between VIS and the offender expressing remorse?

## QUESTION 2

What is the relationship between VIS and the offender issuing an apology?

## QUESTION 3

What is the relationship between VIS and the offender taking responsibility?



## Methods

- N = 877 cases of sentencing rulings from 2016-2018 found from CanLII
- Codebook containing variables
- Remorse, apology, and responsibility
- Victim impact statement

# Results

## QUESTION 1

No relationship  
between a victim  
impact statement  
and remorse  
(n = 622, X = .008,  
p = .931)

## QUESTION 2

No relationship  
between a victim  
impact statement  
and apology  
(n = 259, X = .423,  
p = .515)

## QUESTION 3

No relationship  
between a victim  
impact statement  
and responsibility  
(n = 432, X =  
.836, p = .360)





# Concluding Remarks

- **These findings suggest that victims are unlikely to receive offender remorse, apology, or responsibility when giving a VIS**
- **Implications?**
- **Future Research?**

**Thank you!**  
**Any Questions?**

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