



RESEARCH SYNTHESSES:

# CVR's Process for Compiling the Best Available Evidence

Understanding how to help victims of crime means learning from both victimization research and practitioners' experiences. The information practitioners gain through the process of serving victims (practice evidence) and the information researchers collect through studying victimization experiences (research evidence) are invaluable to helping communities advance their knowledge of and response to crime victims.

Service providers can improve their prevention and response efforts with an accurate understanding of the rates, risks, and protections related to victimization. Similarly, an evidence base can help policymakers, funders, and other stakeholders understand victims' experiences, emerging victimization trends, effective service responses, and how to enforce victims' rights, particularly for underserved groups.

Yet, in the victim services' field, there remains a sizable gap in communication, information sharing, and application between researchers and practitioners. The Center for Victim Research (CVR) is working hard to bridge that gap.

## CVR'S EVIDENCE SYNTHESSES

A key part of CVR's mission is to connect victim service providers and researchers to share knowledge and data that helps improve victim services nationwide. In addition to encouraging researchers and practitioners to actively collaborate, we are summarizing what is already known about victims' needs and experiences.

CVR's evidence syntheses are helping build an evidence base for victim services on what we know about helping crime victims. A strong evidence base can provide actionable information to service providers working to address crime and support survivors. It also helps victim researchers understand what important issues still need to be explored.

CVR's syntheses present a systematic review of what is known from the best available research, practice, and contextual evidence. They aim to address the following key questions:

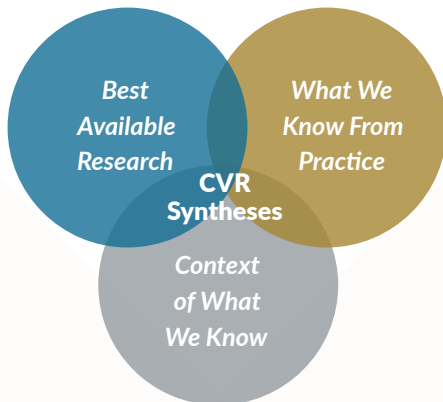
- How often does victimization occur and how do we identify victims?
- What are the harms and consequences of victimization experiences?
- What risk factors increase certain groups' vulnerability to victimization and its harms?
- What intervention and prevention services are helpful at addressing victimization harms?
- What are the implications of what we know for future practice, policy, and research efforts?

**Objectives of CVR's Syntheses**

- Determine the amount of evidence for a particular victimization type
- Summarize findings from the best available research, practice, and contextual evidence
- Show how evidence differs for different populations and underserved populations

## DEFINING EVIDENCE

CVR adapted the Centers for Disease Control's [Evidence Project's](#) framework to define and guide an understanding of the evidence to be reviewed.



According to the Evidence Project's definitions:

- **Best available research** means “information derived from scientific inquiry that assists in determining whether or not a prevention program, program or policy is actually achieving its intended outcomes.” In other words, we look for evidence that responses to victims are actually working. We also look at evidence that answers the full scope of questions on victimization.
- **What we know from practice**, or experiential evidence, is the “collective experience and expertise of those who have practiced or lived in a particular setting.” CVR is systematically gathering this evidence from national organizations and stakeholders with subject matter expertise on each topic. For example, the [Homicide Co-Victims](#) synthesis reviewed practice information from the Office for Victims of Crime and the Dougy Center websites.
- **The context of what we know** refers to “measurable factors in the community that might impact the success of a prevention strategy.” In our reviews, we identify contextual evidence—such as demographic, geographic, and other factors—that might be related to victims' experiences and the services provided to them.

### Key Terms

**Boolean Search:** a type of search allowing users to combine keywords with operators or modifiers such as AND, NOT, and OR to produce more relevant results

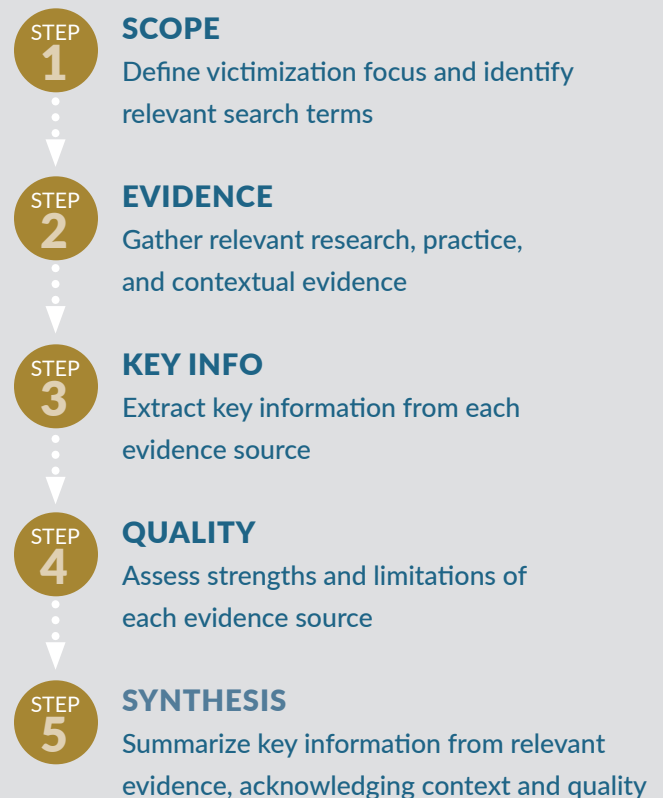
**Evidence:** data or findings contained in research or practice materials, such as journal articles, reports, book chapters, or fact sheets

**Grey Literature:** materials not published in traditional academic channels, such as dissertations or government-funded reports

**Synthesis:** systematic review of evidence from multiple sources that assesses, summarizes, and explains the findings

**Snowball Searches:** reviewing the reference list or citations from evidence sources to identify additional sources of evidence

### CVR Synthesis Process



## CONDUCTING EVIDENCE REVIEWS

CVR's team conducts reviews of victim research, practice, and contextual evidence by working through the following steps (see infographic "CVR Synthesis Process").

### Step 1: Defining the Scope

First, we identify a victimization type and preliminarily explore information from key organizations and stakeholders with relevant subject matter expertise. Examining their work helps us define the specific victimization focus.

For example, exploring homicide co-victimization information helped CVR's team realize we could not also include evidence specific to co-victims of those killed in the line of duty. Similarly, exploration of fraud and identity theft information helped us clarify that elderly financial exploitation by trusted others would be covered by CVR's elder abuse synthesis.

Next, once the victimization scope is defined, we customize a strategy for comprehensively searching evidence in the field. CVR's searches cover academic research databases and grey literature (see "Key Terms" box), as well as websites of topic-relevant and/or notable organizations and resource centers.

### Step 2: Gathering the Evidence

In the second step of CVR's synthesis process, we implement the search strategy. Searches are designed to identify both research evidence, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, reports, and book chapters, as well as practice evidence, such as task force minutes, fact sheets, and informational videos.

More specifically, CVR's search strategy includes the following (see Appendix for more detail):

1. Formal **Boolean searches** of academic databases using search strings based on Boolean operators;
2. Formal searches of websites of national victim service and other relevant organizations using keyword searches (or Boolean search strings if possible); and
3. Informal **snowball searches** using references cited in relevant materials.

### Evidence Eligibility Criteria

#### Standard inclusion criteria

- Evidence/source is available in English.
- Evidence was produced in 2000 or later.
- Evidence falls within the victimization scope, as defined in Step 1.

#### Inclusion criteria that only apply to research evidence

Research evidence should have either a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approach.

#### Inclusion criteria that only apply to practice evidence

Practice evidence should meet at least one of the following:

- Evidence source reflects multiple perspectives or a consensus among practitioners and/or victims.
- Evidence source is repeatedly cited in the field (i.e., 3 times or more).
- Evidence source is a key product from a government agency or non-governmental organization, or credentialed expert well-known in the victimization field of focus.

All potentially relevant sources identified through these searches are catalogued for CVR's eligibility criteria review. CVR applies standard eligibility criteria to all sources, plus research- and practice-specific criteria, as shown in the "Evidence Eligibility Criteria" box.

Research evidence identified through academic database searches is exported to EPPI-Reviewer 4 software, where the sources are manually screened for eligibility based on titles and abstracts. EPPI records CVR's decisions on whether to include or exclude each source.

Practice evidence identified through website searches is manually catalogued in Excel with the search date, website searched, search terms used, number of original hits, number of eligible sources, and reasons for exclusion documented.

### Step 3. Extracting Key Information

Once the relevant research and practice evidence sources are identified using the eligibility criteria, CVR's team extracts key information from each source, including:

- Primary victimization type (e.g., homicide co-victimization, elder abuse)
- Other victimization types addressed
- Evidence focus (e.g., victimization risk factors, services/interventions)
- Contextual factors related to evidence (e.g., victim population, intervention setting)
- Study methods and outcomes, if relevant
- Strengths and limitations of the evidence

To document the essential information, CVR's team uses a pre-defined data extraction tool created using Qualtrics software. This tool was developed and pilot tested internally to ensure consistency between coders in extracting all relevant information from the sources.

After key information is extracted from all relevant sources, a detailed outline of the evidence synthesis is created. It is then reviewed for focus accuracy, and comprehensiveness.

### Step 4. Assessing Evidence Quality

The fourth step in CVR's synthesis process is to assess the quality of each evidence source, using its strengths and limitations. The aim is to focus on high-quality research and practice evidence based on specific criteria that prioritizes more rigorous evidence.

For example, research evidence is screened on key indicators of strength related to different research designs. Studies that have larger, nationally representative samples are prioritized over smaller, community-based studies—though findings from both types are presented in the syntheses.

Similarly, practice evidence is prioritized according to the number of practice-specific inclusion criteria it meets (see Step 2). Practice sources that represent multiple stakeholders' perspectives, are repeatedly cited in the field, and were produced by a credentialed subject matter expert are prioritized over sources that do not meet all these criteria.

Additionally, CVR has implemented several strategies to maintain rigorous standards and quality assurance in its review process. First, all CVR researchers are trained before starting the evidence search and coding process, including a 2-week pilot to ensure consistency in eligibility decisions. Second, the work is routinely checked by senior reviewers throughout the process. Third, senior advisors provide interim reviews on synthesis findings.

Lastly, drafts of each victimization evidence synthesis undergo multiple waves of external review by at least one **researcher expert** and at least one **practitioner expert** in the field with subject matter expertise.

### Step 5. Summarizing Information

The last step in CVR's synthesis process is to summarize the evidence for each victimization topic into a research brief and a full report. The syntheses of available information help determine where there is shared understanding about victims' realities and needs, and where gaps in knowledge still exist.

CVR's syntheses go beyond assessments of quantitative evidence on the effectiveness of victim services. Rather, we assess evidence from both qualitative and quantitative research designs, and rigorous practice materials, to clarify what is known about the following:

- Prevalence and detection of victimization;
- Risk and protective factors;
- Harms and consequences;
- Services and interventions; and
- Implications for victim research, practice, and policy.

Findings from CVR's syntheses are disseminated in a variety of accessible formats. In addition to the research brief and report, CVR's team shares findings in a national CVR webinar, at state and national researcher and practitioner conferences, and through other organizational websites.

**Through all of these efforts, CVR is helping to strengthen the evidence base for improving victim services nationwide.**

## APPENDIX. SEARCH SPECIFICS

**Academic Databases.** CVR searches the following databases for relevant research evidence: Google Scholar, Criminal Justice Abstracts with Full Text, EconLit, Open Dissertations, SocINDEX with Full Text, and Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection. During the scoping process, we use combinations of search terms described in the table below.

### Academic Database Search Strategy and Example

<b>Search #1</b>	Search restrictions (Ex. released after 2000 and in English)
<b>Search #2</b>	Victimization terms (Ex. (elder OR senior OR elderly) AND (abuse OR mistreatment OR neglect OR victimization OR crime))
<b>Search #3</b>	Prevalence terms (Ex. prevalence OR incidence OR trends OR detect)
<b>Search #4</b>	Risk and protective factor terms (Ex. risk OR protective OR resilience OR cope)
<b>Search #5</b>	Harms and consequences terms (Ex. harms OR impact OR cost OR loss)
<b>Search #6</b>	Services, programs, and interventions terms (Ex. response OR advocacy OR prevention OR safety OR policies)
<b>Search #7</b>	Search#1 AND Search#2 AND (Search #3 OR Search#4 OR Search#5 OR Search#6)

### Websites of Key Resource Centers and Organizations.

For each review, we also search the websites of key victimization resource centers and other notable organizations, including the Office for Victims of Crime, National Institute of Justice, National Criminal Justice Reference Service, CrimeSolutions, National Center for Victims of Crime, Justice Research and Statistics Association, Urban Institute, and other topic-relevant, victim service organizations.

In every organizational repository, we check up to the first 100 relevant search results. On websites of organizations without Boolean search capacity, we review all individual webpages that are potentially relevant.