

Should I use the term victim or survivor?

We usually use the term “victim” when referring to someone who has recently been affected by crime.

We often use “survivor” to refer to someone who has gone through the recovery process, or when discussing the short- or long-term effects of crime.

Some people identify as a victim, while others prefer the term survivor. The best way to be respectful is to ask for their preference.

A victim is defined by the harm that has come to them; **a survivor is defined by their life afterwards**. A victim has been destroyed and mistreated; a survivor has continued to live and prosper despite having been victimized. A victim is powerless, at the mercy of others; a survivor has reclaimed their power.

The language we use has a significant impact on how we view ourselves and the world. Using the word “victim” to describe someone diminishes their strength and resilience. It keeps focus on their traumatic experiences instead of everything that they have accomplished since then. For many survivors of trauma, simply going about their day-to-day routine takes incredible reserves of strength and determination.

The duality of the definitions of ‘victim/survivor’ attests to the importance of maintaining both terms, of linking them to describe this life.

One does not come without the other, one does not outweigh the other, one does not replace the other.

Rather, they are the conditions, the competing realities of a post-event existence. What it confirms, and describes is the reality of no-closure. This experience doesn’t end, one day, when you just ‘get over it’. You keep on surviving it. Each time that experience of victimhood is brought up again,

forced upon you to relive, it is outlived and, each experience of surviving victimisation is a confirmation of your strength, your humanity and your dignity. It is a rebuttal of the experience of victimhood, a rejection and a dismissal. Each time you pick yourself up, each time you go at it again, you break the attacker's binds upon you and assert your full and equal right to life on your terms.

"I prefer the word "victim" because it places the focus back where it belongs: on the terrorist who turned me into a victim. I had no choice in that, and I don't have much choice about how I respond to it either. It's always been strange to me how proponents of survivor rhetoric so often push "survivor" as the most appropriate thing for all victims, going so far as to explain in-depth why calling yourself a victim is a no-no."