

Third-party Punishment Victim Empowerment

Punishment serves as a tool to communicate with offenders and to prevent them from future transgressions. Likewise, punishment sends a signal to victims. However, surprisingly little is known how third-party punishment affects victims. In five preregistered experiments, we demonstrate that third-party punishment empowers victims, and that this is amplified when it is performed by the entire group and not an individual third party. Mediation analysis and causal chain designs show that punishment validates jeopardized norms while re-establishing victims' status as group members, thereby empowering them. Further, we mimic punishment in different societal sanctioning institutions, such as peer punishment, punishment via a designated punisher (mimicking a judge in judicial contexts), and via an elected representative (mimicking a democratic leader), and examine their empowering effect on victims. The findings emphasize the effects that punishment has on victims and contribute to the understanding of how this supports victims to cope effectively with their experiences.