



Situational Crime Prevention, Advice Giving, and Victim-Blaming

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Abstract

Situational crime prevention (SCP) measures attempt to prevent crime by reducing the opportunities for crime to occur. One of the ways in which some SCP measures reduce such opportunities is by providing victims with advice about how to avoid being victimised, for instance through public awareness campaigns or safety apps. Some scholars claim that this approach to preventing crime often or always promotes victim-blaming and that it is therefore morally wrong to pursue such strategies. Others have made sweeping rejections of this claim. However, in this paper, I suggest that neither view is correct. Specifically, I demonstrate that there are at least three distinct ways of interpreting what I term the victim-blaming argument against advice-giving SCP measures – i.e. as an argument based on a concern for direct victim-blaming, indirect victim-blaming, or self-blame – and that both SCP opponents and supporters have legitimate grounds for their position, depending on how the argument is spelled out.

Keywords Situational Crime Prevention · The Victim-Blaming Argument · Victim-Blaming · Self-Blame

1 Introduction

Situational crime prevention (SCP) measures attempt to prevent crime by manipulating or influencing potential offenders' opportunities to commit crimes (Freilich & Newman, 2017). One of the ways that some SCP measures aim to achieve this is by making it more difficult or risky for potential offenders to engage in acts of crime by, for example, erecting fences or increasing surveillance (Clarke, 2009). Other

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measures consist in encouraging potential *victims* to adjust their behaviour in ways that remove or considerably reduce perpetrators' opportunities for crime. Indeed, as Wortley notes, "situational prevention techniques often rely on citizens taking precautions against their own victimization" (Wortley, 2010, p. 5). However, both in the scholarly literature and in the public sphere, many worry that victim-centred SCP measures shifts the responsibility for crime prevention away from the state/police and towards the potential victims of crime, and in doing so, potentially promotes morally wrongful victim-blaming (e.g. van Rooij & Fine, 2021, p. 526; Biana & Domingo, 2022).¹ Specifically, proponents of the view that SCP measures promote victim-blaming usually single out SCP measures that provide advice to potential victims on how they can prevent crime by reducing opportunities for it to occur. Such advice-giving may of course take many forms, but includes advising car owners that they are less likely to have their car stolen if they park the car in a garage at night (Clarke, 2000), campaigns that inform people about the advantage of locking their bike to prevent it from being stolen (Sidebottom et al., 2009), and safety apps that inform its user when s/he enters an area deemed unsafe (Biana & Domingo, 2022; Bivens & Hasinoff, 2018). It also plausibly includes the emails many of us regularly receive from our employer and occasionally from state actors warning us to adjust our internet activity to avoid phishing scams. Other examples include informational campaigns from police departments advising (usually young) people not to engage in behaviour such as accepting free drugs or drinks (Petter, 2019), or the call for women to attend self-defence classes in order to protect themselves against rape and other violent crimes (Hollander, 2009).

Now, proponents of advice-giving SCP measures usually deny that such measures blame victims. Furthermore, they often add that even if SCP measures do blame victims, this can be morally justified in some cases because "if people decide to take a known or easily knowable risk, they must bear some of the responsibility for the consequences" (Clarke, 2000, p. 107; see also Wortley, 2010; Tilley & Sidebottom, 2014; Clarke & Bowers, 2017, p. 132). In this paper, I shall suggest that one way to understand the current debate is by theorising about whether we should accept fundamentally different interpretations of what I will call *the victim-blaming argument against advice-giving SCP measures* (or *the victim-blaming argument* for short). However, both proponents and opponents of the victim-blaming argument(s) have usually confined discussions of this topic to (at most) a page or two in their articles or book chapters. It is surprising that neither camp has devoted more time and energy to this issue, because the questions of whether and how SCP measures promote victim-blaming may have considerable, and morally problematic, consequences for the victims of crime. For example, being the target of victim-blaming is sure to often be highly distressing, particularly by often being accompanied by stigmatization from the wider community. The aim of the paper is to start to make up for this shortcoming. Specifically, the paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, Sect. 2, I shall

¹ Other moral considerations in relation to SCP measures, considerations that I cannot in this short paper give the attention they merit, include the concerns that many such measures violate the agency of their targets (von Hirsch & Shearing, 2000; cf. Holmen, 2023), that they display a untrusting, and therefore disrespectful, attitude towards other citizens (Duff & Marshall, 2000), and that SCP measures usually displace rather than prevent crime (Felson & Clarke, 1997).

say more about how I conceive of the term victim-blaming, as well as offer a reconstruction of the victim-blaming argument. Sections 3–5 then consider three different variations of this argument related to what I term direct victim-blaming, indirect victim-blaming, and self-blame. Section 6 summarises and concludes.

2 Preliminaries: Victim-blaming and the Victim-blaming Argument

Defining victim-blaming is made somewhat difficult by the fact that there is much disagreement among philosophers as to what, exactly, blame is (Tognazzini & Coates, 2018). In this paper, I shall adopt a minimal or general definition of victim-blaming, according to which victim-blaming is the act of blaming the victim of a harm or a wrong for the occurrence of said harm or wrong. More precisely, I shall understand victim-blaming as the declaration by someone² to the effect that the victim of a harm or wrong is (at least partly) morally responsible for the harm or wrong that has befallen them. This definition is in line with the definition first offered by Ryan (1976), who understood victim-blaming as the act(s) of attributing the causes of social and economic inequality in a society to the victims of said inequalities. Ryan uses the example of attributing the bad health of the poor with their lack of interest in and/or ignorance regarding how to take care of their own health. It also broadly aligns with more substantial definitions of victim-blaming later offered by other philosophers (e.g. Illingworth, 1990; Harvey, 1995; Q & Wallace, 2020).

Let us now turn to considering how victim-blaming, thus understood, relates to advice-giving SCP measures. As noted in the introduction, one way to summarise the current debate regarding advice-giving SCP measures and the charge of victim-blaming is to say that it revolves around whether we should accept the victim-blaming argument:

- P1: Promoting victim-blaming is morally wrong.
- P2: Advice-giving SCP measures promote victim-blaming.
- C: Advice-giving SCP measures are thus morally wrong to employ.

This argument is logically valid, but the lack of systematic attention by participants in the debate has meant that the two premises have not been thoroughly specified, and thus the conclusion that advice-giving SCP measures are morally wrong to employ may rest on shaky grounds. In the sections to come, I will consider three interpretations of the victim-blaming argument which are based primarily on different understandings of *how* advice-giving SCP measures may be thought to promote victim-blaming. As will be clear, by some interpretations it seems fair to say that opponents of the victim-blaming argument are correct in asserting that advice-giving SCP measures should not be ruled out based on the premise that they blame the victim. According to other interpretations, however, proponents of the argument may

² Usually this is someone other than the victim such as the members of the community or law enforcement agents. However, the definition allow that it might in some cases also be the victim himself or herself that makes the ascription of moral responsibility to themselves.

be right to claim that in fact they should be ruled out for this very reason. In Sect. 3, I consider the view that advice-giving SCP measures are inherently victim-blaming (the direct victim-blaming interpretation). In Sect. 4, I turn to an interpretation that turns on the idea that such measures promote victim-blaming by generating more opportunities for individuals to victim-blame (the indirect victim-blaming interpretation). Lastly, in Sect. 5, I consider the view that advice-giving SCP measures promote victim-blaming by deepening self-blame (the self-blame interpretation).

3 Advice-giving SCP Measures and Direct Victim-blaming

As noted above, one interpretation of the the victim-blaming argument is to understand it as claiming that advice-giving SCP measures promote morally wrongful victim-blaming by implicitly or explicitly blaming victims of potential criminal harm for the said potential harm. Call this *direct victim-blaming*. An example of this, or so it has been claimed, might be the campaign from the West Yorkshire Police that tried to get young people to stop accepting free drinks by running the tagline “Free stuff can come at a very high price. The price you pay could be rape” (Petter, 2019). Should we accept a variation of the argument turning on direct victim-blaming? I believe we should answer this question in the negative for two reasons.

First, insofar as advice-giving SCP measures merely involve “giving people information about behaviours that put them at risk of crime” (Clarke, 2000, p. 106), then this hardly amounts to victim-blaming. One reason for this is that any plausible conception of victim-blaming requires that for an act to count as victim-blaming, it must involve a claim to the effect that potential victims would be in the wrong if they did *not* take certain precautions.³ It must involve this claim, because if it does not, the potential victim is not being said to be *blameworthy*, i.e. to be an appropriate target for blame (Talbert, 2019). What matters here is that the mere presentation of information about what behaviours put one at risk of crime does not seem to meet such a wrongness-condition.⁴ This, of course, does not mean that *no* advice-giving SCP measures meet this condition. For example, persuasive arguments offered by several feminist scholars and commentators in relation to SCP advice-giving in the form of, for example, informational campaigns (Brooks, 2011; Campbell, 2005, pp. 128–133) and women’s safety apps (Westmarland et al., 2013; Bivens & Hasinoff, 2018, p. 11) aimed at preventing sexual assaults seem to suggest that such measures often *do* meet this wrongness-condition, by implying that by not following the proffered advice, the potential victim would be actively courting assault.

³ That is, as Illingworth puts it, victim-blaming is necessarily evaluative (Illingworth, 1990).

⁴ I say that it does not *seem* to meet this condition because, as Duff and Marshal (2004, pp. 27–28) observe, much depends on how individuals perceive and interpret the information. That is, *if* it is usually case, for example, that individuals interpret information offered by state actors as involving the normative claim that recipients of the information ought to employ it to avoid harm, then it may be plausible to say that even the mere presentation of information meets the wrongness-condition. On the other hand, if people generally tend to interpret such advice as being entirely optional and without normative weight, then this argument would be less plausible.

However, and second, a more general problem for the idea of advice-giving SCP measures being directly victim-blaming is that it is not clear that it is conceptually possible to engage in acts of *prospective* victim-blaming.⁵ If it is not possible, the argument fails. This requires some explanation. As noted above, there are many competing theories of what precisely constitutes blame, however all of them involve a retrospective element (Tognazzini & Coates, 2018). Blame is a response of some kind to something of normative importance that someone has *already* done (or failed to do). If this is true, then it is not clear that advice-giving SCP measures can be classified as victim-blaming for the simple reason that such measures have the wrong temporal orientation, i.e. they express or suggest something about how potential victims could or should act in the future (e.g. “do not go there at night”, “lock your bike”, “do not dress provocatively”, etc.). Now, such advice may, of course possibly involve an implicit or explicit conditional prospective claim to the effect that *if* people fail to act in accordance with the advice, *then* they may be blamed for the harm they themselves have suffered. However, this is plausibly better conceptualised as a warning or a threat of victim-blaming rather than itself constituting an act of direct victim-blaming.⁶ If this is correct, then an argument concluding that advice-giving SCP measures are morally wrong to employ that rests on the premise that such measures promote *direct* victim-blaming, should be rejected.

However, suppose that what has been argued above is wrong. Suppose for example that victim-blaming *can* in fact be prospective or that advice-giving SCP measures involve direct victim-blaming in some other way.⁷ Would this show that such measures should not be employed to prevent crime? In my view, this is not the case.

First, unless we are absolutists regarding the wrongness of victim-blaming,⁸ even if an SCP measure directly blames the victim and is morally bad for this reason, there may plausibly be other factors that should still persuade us to employ the measure *all things considered*. That is, the harm and/or moral wrong a victim-blaming measure involves may sometimes be outweighed by the benefits that the measure creates. One example where this observation seems relevant is regarding advice-giving SCP measures that encourage women to attend self-defence classes to learn to protect themselves against rape and other violent crimes. Besides the possible benefit of being able to deter possible attackers, Hollander (2009, p. 9), for example, also observes that “learning self-defense carries with it a host of other benefits to women, including reduced fear, increased self-confidence, more comfortable interactions with others, more positive feelings about one’s body, and a general sense of empowerment and self-worth.” Given these benefits of self-defence training to women, it is at least arguable that advising women to attend such classes is morally desirable even if doing so

⁵ My thanks to Jesper Ryberg for turning my attention to this issue.

⁶ It may of course be morally wrong to threaten someone with victim-blaming in this way to prevent crime, but that is quite another matter than the one we are considering here.

⁷ A hypothetical example of this might be if an advice-giving SCP measure was used to try to combat revictimisation among rape victims by blaming them for once being victims of rape.

⁸ That is, I am here ignoring those that hold that moral restrictions against victim-blaming can never be outweighed by the benefits of violating the constraint. Kagan (1998) for this way of characterising absolutism.

is an act of direct victim-blaming.⁹ To be clear, to say that the use of victim-blaming SCP measures may sometimes be all things considered justified is compatible with holding that an injustice, perhaps a grave one, or other moral wrong is done to the targets of victim-blaming, an injustice or moral wrong that may require us to compensate the victim the best we can. The more moderate point I am making is that it is not plausible to argue that the fact that direct victim-blaming occurs when employing a SCP measure is *ipso facto* sufficient justification for not employing the SCP measure.¹⁰

Second, and more importantly, even if what was argued above is incorrect there are plausibly cases where it seems morally appropriate – or, at least, not morally objectionable – to employ SCP measures that directly blame the victim. Consider the following case as an example:

Shoplifting.

A town is plagued by instances of shoplifting because the town's shop owners keep placing their most expensive items somewhere in the stores that make them easy targets for shoplifters. Local authorities therefore launch an informational campaign to have shop owners move the items to safer locations in their stores. Besides highlighting the problem of shoplifting and providing instructions for shop owners about how to better protect their wares, the campaign also explicitly claims that shop owners ought to follow this advice because they should not waste police resources, and that the members of community will blame them if they continue to leave their wares in easy to reach places.

If it is possible to prospectively directly blame victims, then the advice-giving SCP measure described in the shoplifting example is plausibly an instance of this. However, if it is true that wasting police resources when it can be avoided at a low cost is morally wrong,¹¹ then it is surely *not* wrong to instruct others that they should not do so and to hold them accountable if they do so anyway. Or, to put it differently, to claim that the above shoplifting example is a case of *wrongful* direct victim-blaming requires us to accept that requesting that others conduct themselves in an ethical way is morally wrong, all else being equal. Such a requirement would be dubious, since it seems to judge as morally wrong many moral interactions which are surely innocuousness or even desirable. For example, it would then be wrong to attempt to persuade others to keep their promises and blame them if they do not. The more general point to take away from this is, I believe, that whether an instance of direct victim-blaming is morally permissible or not seems to turn in large part on whether the prescription

⁹ For a summary of the concern that advocating for self-defence training for women may constitute an implicit act of victim-blaming, see e.g. Cermele (2004, pp. 3–4).

¹⁰ We might, of course, plausibly take issue with the fact that employing advice-giving SCP measures does not address the underlying causes for why victimization, and thus potential victim-blaming, occurs. That is, that such measures are morally problematic to use because they do not address the so-called *root causes* of crime (Kleinig, 2000). For a discussion of this concern in relation to SCP, see Wortley (2010) or Petersen (Forthcoming).

¹¹ I take it that all plausible ethical theories will converge on the view that, *ceteris paribus*, people should not waste scarce police resources when they can avoid doing so at little cost to themselves.

it offers – i.e. that doing or not doing X to prevent a crime is something the potential victim ought to do – is morally reasonable or not.¹² Importantly, notice also that this approach to judging whether an instance of victim-blaming is morally permissible is able to support the, in my view correct, position regarding the wrongness of blaming victims of sexual assault. At least this is so if there is convergence on the view that it is morally unreasonable to expect women to self-exclude from public areas or dress in certain ways to avoid being a victim of sexual assault. There seems to me to be several grounds on which to conclude that such an expectation would indeed be morally unreasonable based on, for example, principles of fairness (see e.g. Duff and Marshal 2004, p. 28) or the principle of respect for autonomy.

Some may, however, object to the view that SCP measures that directly victim-blame (if these do indeed exist) can ever be morally permissible to employ to prevent crime. Specifically, they may argue as follows: the wrongness of victim-blaming stems from the fact that when one blames victims one falsely claims that the perpetrators of the crime are *less* morally responsible for the harm inflicted than they in fact are.¹³ One does so because in the act of victim-blaming, some or all of the moral responsibility for the relevant harm is necessarily shifted to the victim (Illingworth, 1990; Wolfendale, 2016). To put it differently, according to this objection the perpetrators of crimes are *always* fully morally responsible for committing the crime, and shifting some or all of this responsibility to the victim is morally wrong.¹⁴ One reason to hold this to be so is because this transfer of moral responsibility falsely implies that the victim has less or “no grounds on which to seek redress” (Illingworth, 1990, p. 117). Now, on the back of this, it could be argued that rather than being morally permissible, the shoplifting example is, in fact, morally objectionable because the informational campaign instigated by the city officials falsely implies that the people doing the shoplifting are not fully morally responsible for their crime because of the way shop owners have placed their wares, and hence that shop owners cannot seek (full) redress. Indeed, it may be further claimed, since *all* SCP measures involving victim-blaming claim something akin to this about the perpetrators’ moral responsibility, these measures are *all* morally wrong to employ. Does this objection suffice to show that I am wrong to claim that at least some victim-blaming SCP measures can be permissible to employ to prevent crime? I do not believe this to be so.

The most important reason I do not believe this objection undermines my claim is that the objection assumes a model of moral responsibility which should be rejected. To understand why, it is useful to employ a distinction between accounts of responsibility discerned by Kleinig (2000). The first are *hydraulic models* of moral respon-

¹² An alternative criterion is one of *statistical reasonableness* according to which the prescription is reasonable (and, thus, an instance of victim-blaming morally unproblematic) if it prescribes acts that other people who share the victim’s demographics are statistically likely to do anyway (see Duff and Marshal (2000) for a brief mention of this criterion). In my view, however, statistical reasonableness is not a plausible criterion in the present context because it implies, absurdly, that an informational campaign that claims that women who do not dress conservatively are partly to blame for their victimization is morally unproblematic if the majority of women in the society dress conservatively.

¹³ I am here assuming that the claim must be false. After all, if the claim is true – i.e. that the victim’s actions *do* lessen the perpetrators’ responsibility – then the objection loses all its force.

¹⁴ For this way of formulating the objection, see Tilley and Sidebottom (2017, p. 9).

sibility. According to such views, “There is just so much responsibility to go around, and as the potential victim’s responsibility increases, the [perpetrator’s] responsibility decreases” (Kleinig, 2000, p. 53).¹⁵ Kleinig contrasts this with what he terms *accordion models* of moral responsibility, according to which moral responsibility for a crime can be extended without being reduced. This latter account implies that “If one person commits crime A and two people commit crime B which is substantively the same, the involvement of the additional actor does not *ipso facto* diminish the full responsibility that each actor has for B” (Kleinig, 2000, p. 53). Now, notice that unless a hydraulic model is assumed in the objection under consideration, it is not clear why we should think that victim-blaming subtracts responsibility for the harm from the perpetrator.

However, I believe that we have good reason to be sceptical of hydraulic models of moral responsibility and, by extension, to be sceptical of the objection. To see why, consider a case involving multiple perpetrators of a murder.¹⁶ Suppose, as hydraulic models would have us believe, that there is some set amount of moral responsibility that can be distributed for a murder. And suppose that there are three perpetrators of the murder – call them X, Y, and Z. We may suppose, for example, that the victim is stabbed in such a way that one stab would not kill him/her, but three would. Call this *case A*. In case A, the hydraulic model would have us say that X, Y, and Z share the responsibility for the murder – each are partly morally responsible for the murder. Now imagine *case B* which is identical to case A except that X is the sole perpetrator of the murder. In case B, proponents of hydraulic models (and, I suspect, proponents of most other models of moral responsibility including accordion models) would readily say that X is fully morally responsible for the murder. Notice, that in both case A and case B, the actions of X are causally necessary, but *not* causally sufficient for the murder to occur. What X needs in both cases are what Zimmerman (1985) calls “the co-operation of other occurrences and conditions” (p. 116). In case B this involves such things as the laws of physics being operative, the victim not having a gun and shooting X, X’s knife being sharp enough to penetrate the victim’s skin, X not being blinded by the sun as he goes in for the kill, etc. X also needs this in case A, but in addition, *and as seemingly the only difference between the cases*, X needs the cooperation of Y and Z. However, as Zimmerman observes, it is not clear why “this difference between the cases in what occurrences are involved in the co-operation at issue is of any relevance to the assessment of the degree to which [X] is responsible for the outcome” (1985, p. 117). That is, it is not clear why it should make a difference for the ascription of moral responsibility to X for the killing that the range of conditions that needs to be met for the outcome to occur in case A includes the presence and cooperation of Y and Z. Thus, if we want to say (as most surely do) that X is fully responsible in case B, then we must also claim that X is fully responsible in case A. Furthermore, the same argument can be made in regards to Y and Z. However, if this

¹⁵ Interestingly, Kleinig’s discussion and ultimate rejection of the model is in relation to how *defenders* of SCP measures rely on this model for their arguments in favour of employing SCP measures.

¹⁶ The argument I offer here is heavily inspired by Michael Zimmerman’s (1985) arguments against views structurally similar to those which we have here called hydraulic views of moral responsibility. For a more recent elaboration and discussion of Zimmerman’s core argument, see Kaisermann (2021).

is true, then hydraulic models of responsibility are false.¹⁷ By extension, an objection claiming that it is always wrong to employ victim-blaming SCP measures because victim-blaming necessarily diminishes the perpetrator's moral responsibility for the crime, fails. It fails because it is not true that victim-blaming diminishes the moral responsibility of the perpetrator for the crime; even if an act of direct victim-blaming implies that the victim is to some degree morally responsible for a crime, this does not diminish the moral responsibility of the perpetrator(s) for committing the crime.

To summarise this section, it has been argued that it is unclear whether advice-giving SCP measures have the right temporal orientation for them to involve (direct) victim-blaming. It has also been argued that even if this claim turned out to be wrong, and that at least some advice-giving SCP measures thus can and do directly victim-blame, it still would not follow that *no* such measures should be employed to prevent crime. However, it was also argued that if the prescription offered by the advice-giving SCP is morally unreasonable then the victim-blaming implicitly or explicitly expressed by this measure is indeed morally objectionable, at least if other things are equal.

4 Advice-giving SCP Measures and Indirect Victim-blaming

In this section, we shall consider whether the victim-blaming argument presented in Sect. 2 fares better if what it claims is that advice-giving SCP measures *indirectly* promote victim-blaming. By *indirect victim-blaming* I have in mind acts that, while not themselves constituting direct victim-blaming, nevertheless make acts of direct victim-blaming more likely to occur. So, how may advice-giving SCP measures be argued to promote indirect victim-blaming?

Firstly, by publicly offering advice, it is arguable that the measure makes it more likely that people who fail to follow the advice will be blamed by others for any harm that could have been avoided. If, for example, a countrywide informational campaign highlights that locking one's bike will prevent it from being stolen, then it is possible that a person who gets their bike stolen because they did not lock it is likely to receive more blame than they would have in the absence of such a campaign. In my view, at least, the idea that heightening the level of information about how one can (and perhaps should) avoid being the victim of crime could well lead to more cases of direct victim-blaming, is an intuitively plausible one. It is, however, ultimately an empirical question whether and to what extent SCP measures *generally* cause such an increase in direct victim-blaming and for most (albeit, as we shall see shortly, not all) such measures there is to the best of my knowledge no data to confirm or disconfirm the proposed causal relationship at this stage. Furthermore, I argued above that victim-blaming in cases such as the shoplifting example is not morally objectionable. If this is true, then insofar as the acts of victim-blaming are relevantly similar to shoplifting, it would not seem to be wrong to incur such acts by implementing SCP measures.

However, as feminist scholars have rightly highlighted, there is plausibly good reason to think that this mechanism of increasing victim-blaming will be observed

¹⁷ For additional reasons for rejecting such accounts, see Zimmerman (1985) or Kaiserman (2021).

in relation to the subset of advice-giving SCP measures aimed at preventing crimes against women. This is likely to be the case because such advice-giving SCP measures will be introduced into societies whose structures are misogynist, sexist, and otherwise oppressive, structures which may well influence how its members interpret the fact of the advice placing the focus on the victims, rather than the perpetrators. Indeed, these structures certainly already contribute to women's claim of harassment or abuse being often dismissed (Schraub, 2016) and their testimony about such harms being ignored (Engelhardt, 2023) or attributed to what is posited to be character flaws of the women themselves (Stark, 2019). Given these structures, members of the community or wider society might well interpret the heightened level of information about how to avoid being sexually assaulted as an endorsement of the view that victims of sexual assault should be blamed for the harm that befalls them or, perhaps, should not even be considered victims at all (e.g. Manne, 2017, Chap. 7). What this seems to suggest is that even if we should not accept the broad version of the victim-blaming premised on the view that *all* advice-given SCP measures indirectly victim-blame, there is plausibly good reason to accept a narrower version of such an argument. Namely, one premised on the observation that the subset of advice-giving SCP measures aimed at preventing attacks on women likely *will* promote indirect victim-blaming. Importantly, however, even if we accept (as it seems we should) that a linear relationship between these instances of advice-giving and instances of victim-blaming exists, I still do not believe we should accept a version of the argument where the scope of the normative premise would rule out *any* use of advice-giving SCP measures to prevent crimes against women. This is because, similarly to what was argued in the previous section, there may be other considerations that make it *all things considered* morally right to risk cultivating future acts of direct victim-blaming, for the sake of the harm that they prevent. If this is true, then one way to capture this idea is to formulate the normative premise as a *pro tanto* prohibition against employing advice-giving SCP measures intended to prevent crime against women. That is, to accept that there is always a (strong) moral reason *not* to employ these measures, but that this reason can sometimes be defeated by other ethical considerations. In conclusion, the possible heightened risk that people may engage in victim-blaming against those who fail to follow the instructions provided by advice-giving SCP measures does not seem a convincing way to motivate a generalised version of the victim-blaming argument. That is, a version of the argument that rules out *all* use of advice-given SCP measures. However, it does seem to me a plausible approach to formulating a narrower and morally restricted variation of the argument targeting the subset of these measure which aim to prevent crimes against women.

Secondly, there is another way that a set of different advice-giving SCP measures than the ones focused on above could be claimed to be indirectly victim-blaming. Specifically, some studies suggest that advice-giving measures that focus on potential perpetrators may surprisingly provoke victim-blaming attitudes among some individuals. For instance, a problem well-documented by gender scholars is that informational efforts to advise men on how they can avoid sexually assaulting women – e.g. educating them that having sex with someone who is heavily intoxicated legally constitutes rape – sometimes seem to provoke victim-blaming attitudes among some men (Rich et al., 2010; Carline et al., 2018, p. 25). Now, an argument relying on this

understanding of how advice-giving SCP measures promote victim-blaming would not rule out the use of any advice-giving SCP measures that target potential *victims* of crime, and such measures are, of course, usually the primary (if not the sole) targets of victim-blaming-based arguments. However, even if the argument is thus highly restricted, it does provide opponents of advice-giving SCP measures with grounds from which to plausibly argue that at least advice-giving SCP measures targeting perpetrators should not be employed to prevent crime because they indirectly promote victim-blaming. Should we accept this argument? Similar to what was argued above and in previous sections, it does not seem plausible to claim that it is *always* morally wrong to employ advice-giving SCP measures of the kind under consideration, since they are subject to the same kinds of *all things considered* objections as were mentioned above. If, for example, the informational or educational effort turns out to prevent many harmful crimes even as it generates victim-blaming attitudes among potential perpetrators, then employing the measure may still be morally desirable on balance.

However, and as also argued above, a version of this argument claiming that absent such countervailing considerations it is morally wrong to promote victim-blaming attitudes among potential perpetrators seems, in my view at least, plausible. It is plausible because as has been observed in relation to, for example, instances of intimate partner violence, people holding victim-blaming attitudes are known to more often trivialise the harm that victims experience and they are less likely to come to the aid of such victims (Gracia, 2014). Cultivating such attitudes of indifference towards the pain of others and creating (more) bad Samaritans in the world seems a morally very bad thing to do unless there are some heavy overriding reasons for doing so.

In this section, I have considered a version of the victim-blaming argument turning on the idea that advice-giving SCP measures should not be used because they indirectly promote victim-blaming. I considered two variations of this view. The first was the concern that advice-giving SCP measures may make it more likely that victims are blamed by others for the harm they experience. I demonstrated that a variation of the victim-blaming argument positing this type of indirect blaming to make *any* use of advice-giving SCP measures morally impermissible is implausible. However, I also suggested there is at least one subset of such measures (i.e. those attempting to prevent crime against women) that a narrower version this argument could plausibly rule out, other things being equal. The second variation took as its starting point the observation that informational material targeting potential perpetrators has been shown to cultivate victim-blaming attitudes among them. Here I also suggested that there may be something to this version of argument, if the empirical base it relies on turns out to be robust (at least if countervailing moral considerations are absent).

5 Advice-giving SCP Measures and Self-blame

The final variation of the victim-blaming argument that we shall consider turns on potential relationship between advice-giving SCP measures and self-blame. It is by now a well-known psychological phenomenon that many victims of crime groundlessly come to blame themselves for the said crime. Psychological studies of self-

blame in victims – usually focusing on self-blame in cases such as domestic abuse and sexual assault – have found that engaging in some types of self-blame are linked with *inter alia* increased risk of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and re-victimisation (Janoff-Bulman, 1979; Miller et al., 2007; Miller & Porter, 1983; Peter-Hagene & Ullman, 2018; Sigurvinsdottir et al., 2020; Ullman et al., 2007). On the back of this, it seems plausible to argue that if advice-giving SCP measures make it more likely that victims of crime will engage in such harmful self-blame, then they are morally wrong to employ. However, on closer scrutiny it becomes clear that this self-blame variation of the victim-blaming argument faces at least two challenges.

First, there are, to the best of my knowledge, no empirical studies available that show that advice-giving SCP measures or SCP measures more generally promote self-blame. Thus, although this observation does not of course mean that there might not be something to this concern if the necessary studies are conducted, it does imply that as it stands this version of the victim-blaming argument is inconclusive.

Furthermore, and second, psychological studies of self-blame seem to support the speculation that *if* advice-giving SCP measures do turn out to promote self-blame, they promote a kind of self-blame which is of functional value to some victims in at least some cases. Thus, promoting this type of self-blame may not necessarily be morally wrong. This requires some explanation. Conceptual and empirical work has demonstrated that self-blame seems to come in two variations (Janoff-Bulman, 1979). *Behavioural self-blame* is control-based and is blame that a victim directs at themselves for having acted or not acted in certain ways. *Characterological self-blame* on the other hand is esteem-based and is blame that the victims direct at themselves for having certain personal characteristic, e.g. being too trusting, gullible, naïve, etc. It is this latter form of self-blame which is linked to the highest increase in mental health risks and re-victimisation. Behavioural self-blame on the other hand has in some cases been found to be adaptive (Bulman & Wortman, 1977; Hickling et al., 1999), and to often cause less harm than characterological self-blame (Peter-Hagene & Ullman, 2018; Sigurvinsdottir et al., 2020; Ullman et al., 2007).¹⁸ That is, victims showing signs of engaging in behavioural self-blame seem better able to cope with the harm they have been the victims of relative to those experiencing characterological self-blame. In relation to cases of rape, the explanation offered for this is that individuals experiencing behavioural self-blame maintain “a belief in control over one’s outcome” (Janoff-Bulman, 1979, p. 1798). Specifically, that one can avoid future negative outcomes by one’s own volition and effort. Furthermore, it has been suggested that this observation may have a therapeutic upshot, namely, that “leading people to focus on behaviours that are alterable [...] may increase perceived future avoidability of negative events and perceived control in general, outcomes that would presumably be of positive value” (Janoff-Bulman, 1979, p. 1807).

Why is this relevant for the present discussion? It is relevant because the advice-giving SCP measures we are considering here are usually characterised by focusing on, and providing advice regarding, behaviours that are alterable (e.g. “lock your bike so that it does not get stolen”, “do not go through the park alone at night”, “don’t let your drunk friend leave from the pub with a stranger”, “place your wares

¹⁸ But see Miller et al. (2007).

so that they are not an easy target for shoplifters”, etc.). Thus, it does not seem a farfetched speculation that *if* advice-giving SCP measures promote self-blame, they promote behavioural rather than characterological self-blame. However, if it is true that behavioural self-blame is at least sometimes of functional value to victims, then there are plausibly cases where it is desirable to employ advice-giving SCP measures for the very reason that they promote (behavioural) self-blame. Some such cases are those where the only alternative(s) is to employ measures that promote characterological self-blame or otherwise make victims worse off. That such cases exist constitutes a considerable challenge to a victim-blaming argument against advice-giving SCP measures turning on self-blame. At the very least the argument would need to be restricted to apply only to those types of advice-giving SCP measures that promote the more harmful characterological forms of self-blame (if, that is, such measures turn out to exist).

This section has considered whether a victim-blaming argument against advice-giving SCP measures could be grounded in the idea that such measures promote self-blame among victims. I argued that there is currently no empirical literature to back this assertion. However, I also speculated that if advice-giving SCP measures do indeed promote self-blame among victims of crime, then the type of self-blame they promote may sometimes be one that has functional value to victims, which may in fact ultimately reduce the chances of harm coming to them in the future.

6 Conclusion

In the SCP literature and beyond, a contested question is whether advice-giving SCP measures – such as for example information campaigns or women’s safety apps – promote victim-blaming. However, those arguing for or against this claim have not yet given it the systematic attention it merits. In this paper, I have considered three framings of the victim-blaming argument against advice-giving SCP measures: direct victim-blaming, indirect victim-blaming, and self-blame. Based on my discussion of these three interpretations, I concluded that there is limited basis for the sweeping claim that advice-giving SCP measures as such are morally wrong to employ because they promote victim-blaming. Thus, in this sense, critics of the victim-blaming argument are correct in their rejection of it. However, I also argued that there are some, more restricted versions of the victim-blaming argument that do plausibly rule out the use of some types of advice-giving SCP measures. Hence, critique of the use of advice-giving SCP measures on victim-blaming grounds is justified in some cases.

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Declarations

Competing Interests SH has no competing interests to declare.

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