

**ONCE BITTEN, TWICE BITTEN:  
REPEAT VICTIMISATION AND ITS  
IMPLICATIONS FOR CRIME PREVENTION**

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### **Crime Prevention Unit Papers**

The Home Office Police Research Group (PRG) was formed in 1992 to carry out and manage research relevant to the work of the police service and Home Office Policy Divisions. One of the major Police Department divisions which acts as customer for the PRG is the Home Office Crime Prevention Unit which was formed in 1983 to promote preventive action against crime. It has a particular responsibility to disseminate information on crime prevention topics.

The object of the present series of occasional papers is to present research material in a way which should help and inform practitioners, whose work can help reduce crime.

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## Foreword

This report pulls together a number of research results from a variety of sources, much of it carried out with Home Office support. The subject of the report is 'repeat victimisation' – the paper describes the extent to which victims or places are repeatedly subject to crime and speculates about the implications for prevention.

In relation to some offences the repeated vulnerability of particular individuals is self evident – domestic violence is probably the most obvious example. But in relation to other crimes, such as domestic burglary, attacks on schools or car crime the extent to which repetition occurs is far from obvious but clearly shown in the report.

Some of the research had been lying in the academic arena for a long time – but its practical significance for prevention and for policing had not been appreciated. The reduction of repeat victimisation in its several manifestations offers a challenge to the police and their partners in crime prevention. The report is intended to provoke discussion and preventive action across a wide field.

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# Contents

	Page
<b>Foreword</b>	(iii)
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	(iv)
<b>List of Figures and Tables</b>	(vi)
<b>1. HOW TO RATION CRIME PREVENTION</b>	1
Why Did So Few People Notice?	2
<b>2. THE PROBABILITY OF REVICTIMISATION</b>	5
Lightning Often Strikes Twice: But When?	7
Residential Burglary	8
School Burglary and Property Crime	9
Racial Attacks	11
Domestic Violence	11
Future Research	14
<b>3. METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF REPEAT VICTIMISATION</b>	16
Recorded Crime Data	16
Police Incident Logs	17
Crime Survey Data	18
The Time Window	19
Attempted Crime	20
Eligibility for Revictimisation	20
<b>4. PRIORITISING CRIME PREVENTION: THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF REPEAT VICTIMISATION</b>	21
Quick and Transient Response	22
Objections to the Repeat Victimization Approach	23
How to Do It	25
End Note	28
<b>References</b>	29

## List of Figures and Tables

Figure No.	Caption	Page
1	Time course of repeat school crime	9
2	Time course of repeat school crime: repeats within 7 days	10
3	Time course of racial revictimisation	10
4	Time course of repeat domestic violence	11

Table No.	Caption	Page
1	Distribution of victimisation for all offences: 1982 British Crime Survey	6
2	Distribution of victimisation for all offences: 1988 British Crime Survey	6
3	Distribution of victimisation for all offences: 1992 British Crime Survey	7
4	Types of crime with published or to be published source of information on extent and time course of repeat victimisation	12
5	Probabilities of recording repeat burglaries by reporting/recording practice	17

# 1. How to Ration Crime Prevention

Two fundamental questions present themselves in the struggle to prevent crime: where to do it, and how. The first raises the question of the extent to which crime prevention effort can be focussed upon the places and people most liable to suffer crime, or where crime prevention can be effected with greatest ease. The second entails the identification, dissemination and intelligent adaptation to local circumstances of effective prevention. While the two issues should be addressed in parallel, there is a case for regarding the first as logically prior. Furthermore, the choice of where to deploy most effort facilitates the choice of how to do so, since places circumscribe possibilities.

This CPU paper argues that an efficient way of directing crime prevention effort would be to concentrate upon those who have already been victimised. It contends that this would involve an integration of victim support and crime prevention services. It would offer an attractive police performance indicator. Most important, it would automatically locate crime prevention effort where the need is greatest. Crime prevention services are limited, and must be dispensed to best effect. There are many ways of distributing limited services, with different implications for a socially just provision (see Parker 1967 for a classic statement of methods). Attention to repeat victims has much in its favour as a way of allocating crime prevention effort and resources.

Although, as is argued below, this can be a particularly efficient approach, there is very little evidence of it in crime prevention practice. Grimshaw *et al* (1989)<sup>1</sup> detailed the strength and organisation of the crime prevention function within individual police forces. It emerged that the forces with the greatest number of officers engaged in crime prevention work tended also to be the forces with the lowest rates of recorded crime. This result could be read in one of two ways. Either it shows how successful crime prevention officers are, or that those forces facing the greatest volume of crime had least staff resource to devote to the task of crime prevention. No informed person would read the result in the first way.

Having concluded that forces with most crime prevention officers were those with the least crime to prevent, Grimshaw and her colleagues sought to determine where crime prevention effort was directed within forces. It became clear that the bulk of the effort was not directed towards areas with the most acute need. This was not because the officers concerned were inept or lazy. It was because the requests for help came predominantly from respectable organisations in low crime areas. Being properly concerned with good community relations, and often working in Departments

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<sup>1</sup>While things may have changed somewhat since then, the impressions described below are believed to remain generally valid.

<sup>2</sup>To put it more colloquially, you don't think about clearing the swamp when you're up to your neck in alligators.

bearing such a title, officers had a full-time job without going into the long-term and labour-intensive work awaiting them in high-crime areas. That many did try to work in such areas represents the triumph of dedication over prudence. One of the researchers' recommendations was that officers should be required to specify the mechanism through which their work would reduce crime. The importance of specifying mechanism remains (see Tilley 1993). However this was never likely to have the intended effect. It is always easy to produce a banal and spurious justification for any 'crime-prevention' initiative. Police officers (like the rest of us) can produce them at will. Nevertheless, while the Grimshaw et al research failed to produce a solution, it posed the right question. How is serious crime prevention attention to be delivered to the places and people who most need it? As it was restated, how do we get the grease (crime prevention) to the squeak (crime)?

The problem of prioritising service delivery is common to all public sector activities. A compromise has always to be reached between the universal provision of service and selectivity. Just as crime prevention activity tends to be sucked towards less vulnerable people, so it is with some other social services. For instance, claims to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board are disproportionately made by the police and no doubt by others whose lifestyle includes gaining full information about the possibility of making such claims. The response in other types of welfare is selectivity, so that benefits are payable only under certain circumstances. The best known of these involves means-testing, but alternatives are available, such as savings thresholds above which benefit eligibility is withdrawn. Although in principle rationing of resources to prevent crime is precisely analogous to rationing of any other good, the dimension along which need is based is unusual in being future-oriented. Those who need other kinds of benefit are poor, disabled or ill. These are present states, according to which benefits are paid. The currency of crime prevention need is risk, ie the probability of something happening in the future. The key question to be addressed in crime prevention delivery is therefore: what is the appropriate (and hopefully socially uncontentious) criterion according to which crime prevention effort should be allocated? The answer proposed later in this paper is that the criterion should be past crime victimisation, which is by and large, and for whatever reason or combination of reasons, a good predictor of swift future victimisation. The evidence for this will be presented in the next chapter.

The central question which may be in the reader's mind, and which has been posed by police officers and others when faced with the research on repeat victimisation is why the phenomenon of repeat victimisation has been so little studied, and so little applied to crime prevention work.

### **Why Did So Few People Notice?**

Many individual police and victim support workers will have noticed the way in which repeat victimisations occur, and cluster in time. However, such awareness has certainly not been translated into training and research, still less into crime prevention activity. What are the reasons for this?



- (i) Although rates of repeat are substantially higher than expected, they are still quite a small minority of cases in less crime prone areas. Take as an instance a town 6% of whose dwellings suffer a burglary in a typical year. In a usual month 0.5% of dwellings will suffer a burglary. Even if ten times as many dwellings as expected suffer a repeat victimisation within a month, this will only amount to 5% of the dwellings which suffered one burglary. In other words, in less crime prone areas, the absolute number of dwellings suffering repeats is small. This explanation becomes less plausible the higher an area's rate of crime, since the higher the rate of crime, the higher the proportion of repeats. It is also less applicable to offences like domestic violence, where the proportion of cases subject to repeats is particularly high.
- (ii) Calculating the statistically expected level of repeats is not straightforward, and the typical ways of researching it, with time-based data, will lead to underestimates, sometimes gross underestimates (see Chapter 3).
- (iii) The transmission of information across shift and unit boundaries is not efficient. Individual officers may be policing football matches, attending training courses, on holiday or ill. Thus events which are repeated are likely not to be dealt with by the same officers, and consciousness of the frequency of repeats will thus not emerge spontaneously.
- (iv) The police statistical systems with which the writers are familiar are not good at detecting repeat events. Some of the work described below had to be carried out by the manual transcription of computer-held records.
- (v) Even if the rate of repeat victimisation is recognised, there might be an emotional reluctance to be frank about it because it may evoke fear of crime. It is not reassuring to tell a victim that a burglar may indeed come back. Given a choice of economy with the truth, and total frankness which may disconcert, the disconcerting truth is usually to be preferred. The evidence is clear that by and large people prefer the truth to the comforting lie (Bok 1980). However, telling the truth brings with it the responsibility to try and protect from repeats.
- (vi) Those repeatedly victimised may be among the most powerless and inarticulate in society (more true of some crimes eg. racial attacks, than others eg. commercial burglary).
- (vii) A final point which has been made is that it may be preferable to target a bad area than a victimised individual, to avoid the risk of victim-blaming. This acknowledges but ignores high rates of repeat victimisation at the individual level. If this choice is made, it should be recognised that this is a less efficient way of getting the grease to the squeak, because within the worst areas, those victimised have an even higher rate of future victimisation than others.

In Chapter 2, some of the facts about repeat victimisation are rehearsed.<sup>3</sup> Chapter 3 details the measurement of repeat victimisation, some of the technicalities of which go some way to explaining why the phenomenon has not enjoyed a higher profile in police and criminological awareness. In Chapter 4, suggestions are made about how crime prevention services would work if they were centred upon the prevention of repeat victimisation. Some of the problems with such an approach are spelled out.

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<sup>3</sup>The discovery of many of these facts predates our awareness of their significance. It is this which makes the account non-chronological.

## 2 The Probability of Revictimisation

Many different terms have arisen to refer to the same phenomenon: revictimisation, multiple victimisation, repeat victimisation, multi-victimisation, repetitive victimisation and recidivist victimisation. There has been no consistent usage of terminology. Repeat or re-victimisation are the preferred terms in what follows, since they include the two-time victim and seem the least pejorative. To understand repeat victimisation, some terms need to be defined.

Crime *prevalence* refers to the estimated percentage of the population at risk who are victims in a given time period (victims per head). Crime *incidence* refers to the average number of victimisations per head of population at risk of victimisation (crimes per head). A third measure is crime *concentration*<sup>1</sup> which is the average number of victimisations per victim (crimes per victim). In short, prevalence counts victims, incidence counts crimes, and concentration counts crimes per victim.

For all offences save murder, manslaughter and causing death by dangerous driving, there will be more crimes than victims, so incidence is higher than prevalence, and concentration is almost always greater than one.<sup>2</sup>The most common mistake made by those using crime statistics is to look at crime incidence on its own, and to take it as the measure of the crime problem. When a leading politician was introduced to the finding that the 1992 British Crime Survey (BCS) suggested that there were fifteen million crimes per year in England and Wales, his reaction was “Just think – fifteen million people falling victim to crime”. This went unchallenged. In other words, the measure of incidence slides imperceptibly into a measure of prevalence – and no-one notices. This is despite the old Christmas cracker joke which tells that one person is being burgled every twenty four seconds in this country - and she’s getting sick of it. The victim in the joke describes a state of maximum concentration of victimisation (she gets all the crime). The politician’s mistake was to assume a state of minimum concentration (only one crime per person). As will be seen below, the problem is very different when thought of in terms of repeated occurrences of crime against the same people.

The first writers to note and comment on the phenomenon of repeat victimisation were Johnson et al (1973) and Zeigenhagen (1976). The first writers to address the phenomenon theoretically were Sparks et al (1977), Sparks (1981) and Hindelang et al (1978). These analyses showed that the spread of revictimisation did not correspond to a Poisson distribution, suggesting that revictimisation was not caused by ‘bad luck’ or chance.

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<sup>1</sup>See Barr and Pease (1991) for an extended description.

<sup>2</sup>Possible exceptions to the rule will depend upon counting procedures used. Crimes for which there is more than one victim may have greater prevalence.

Repeat victimisation remained virtually uninvestigated,<sup>1</sup> until Gottfredson (1984) drew attention to the high rate of repeat victimisation in the British Crime Survey (BCS). The BCS is a periodic survey of crime, reported and unreported to the police, suffered by its respondents (involving at least 10,000 persons). Table 1 shows the highly skewed distribution of victimisation found in the 1984 survey by Gottfredson. Tables 2 and 3 show a similar distribution for the 1988 and for the 1988 and 1992 surveys, calculated for this paper.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1: Distribution of Victimisation for all Offences: 1982 British Crime Survey**

Number of times victimised	Respondents %	Incidents %
0	68.1	0.0
1	17.8	29.1
2	6.2	20.3
3	3.1	15.2
4	1.8	11.8
5+	2.9	23.7

**Table 2: Distribution of Victimisation for all Offences: 1988 British Crime Survey**

Number of times victimised	Respondents %	Incidents %
0	59.3	0.0
1	19.9	18.5
2	9.1	16.8
3	4.2	11.6
4	2.5	9.1
5+	5.0	43.9

From Table 1, 68%, or over two thirds of the population were not victimised during the survey period (just over one year). Those people who reported having been victimised on two or more occasions, 14% of the population, reported 71% of all the

<sup>1</sup>With one or two notable exceptions (Reiss, 1980, Fienberg, 1980).

<sup>2</sup>For technical reasons, the Gottfredson data understate the amount of repeat victimisation. The 1988 and 1992 data may somewhat overstate it (see Genn 1988; Farrell 1992). The 1988 data was generated from Shah (1991). These tables should therefore not be taken as an indication of change, simply that, by various methods of analysis, the concentration of victimisation a minority of citizens is a stable finding. Because of decisions about appropriate weighting, treatment of ethnic booster samples, and other considerations, generating precisely comparable tables is technically difficult and has not been attempted here. If these tables excite sufficient interest, the more rigorous and lengthy analysis may be attempted.

incidents. The skew of the distribution is such that the 3% of the population who experience five or more crimes suffered almost a quarter of all crime reported. In Tables 2 and 3, the pattern is similar – between 4 and 5% of the respondents suffer 43% of the crimes.

**Table 3: Distribution of Victimisation for all Offences: 1992 British Crime Survey**

Number of times victimised	Respondents %	Incidents %
0	59.5	0.0
1	20.3	18.7
2	9.0	16.5
3	4.5	12.4
4	2.4	8.8
5+	4.3	43.5

Farrell (1992) shows that nine different research methods have generated very similar patterns in the distribution of victimisation. To date, similar patterns of the extent of repeat victimisation have been found in every type of crime which has been scrutinised in this manner. Even the dramatic concentration of crime found is likely to prove an underestimate. There are many reasons for this, and these are rehearsed in Chapter 3 of this report. To give a flavour of the problems, if you ask about crimes suffered during a particular calendar year, some victimisations will appear to be single events, but may be repeats of crimes suffered in the previous year, or the first in a series extending into the next calendar year. The problem arises because the BCS (together with other similar investigations) is a time-based survey.

### **Lightning Often Strikes Twice: But When?**

The evidence set out above does suggest that victimisation is a good predictor of victimisation. In general, if you want to discover where a crime will happen, look where it happened last. With hindsight, most readers will not find that surprising. The reasons for the phenomenon certainly vary. They include:

- living in a bad area (ie close to concentrations of resident or visiting offenders) keeps one vulnerable;
- some people have chaotic lifestyles, occupations or leisure activities which make for continued vulnerability;
- some kinds of victimisation, such as shop theft, although attracting police and court attention, are perceived by their victims as one of the less pleasant circumstances of commercial life;
- some crimes attend bad relationships, and will continue as long as at least

one of the parties to that relationship persists in regarding the relationship as extant.

Whatever the reasons for the high concentration of victimisation (and good prevention practice requires attention to the reasons), it does provide an opportunity for intervention. If repeat victimisation is relatively likely, action can be taken to prevent it. Repeat victimisation in the research described above, however, refers to repeats within one calendar year. A year is a very long time. It is too long to keep special preventive measures in place. It therefore seemed important to determine how transient is the heightened risk. To anticipate the conclusion to be reached, each study reviewed later demonstrates that *the risk of revictimisation is greatest in the period immediately after victimisation*. This result seems robust across crime type, location, and the method and period of study. Based upon this evidence, and following the conclusions of Polvi et al (1990, 1991), the two main policy implications will be developed. They are:

- (i) Crime prevention measures need to be in place soon after victimisation; and
- (ii) temporary prevention measures which provide cover during the high risk period after victimisation might be an effective and efficient means of preventing crime.

### **Residential Burglary**

Whilst Al Reiss addressed the time course issue in 1980, his data did not allow reliable conclusions to be drawn about the time period between one victimisation and the next. In consequence, despite his attention to the point, the policy implications of the findings about the nature of revictimisation were not clear.

It was not until a decade after Reiss that Polvi *et al* (1990, 1991) published their study of residential burglary in Saskatoon, Canada, which showed not only that revictimisation is a significant proportion of all victimisation, but that in the period immediately after a burglary there is a much greater chance of a repeat, and that the magnitude of this risk declined swiftly with time. Polvi *et al* (1991: 412) stated that,

“The likelihood of a repeat burglary within one month was over twelve times the expected rate, but this declined to less than twice the expected rate when burglaries six months apart were considered. Analysis of the repeat burglaries within one month showed that half of the second victimisations occurred within seven days of the first.”

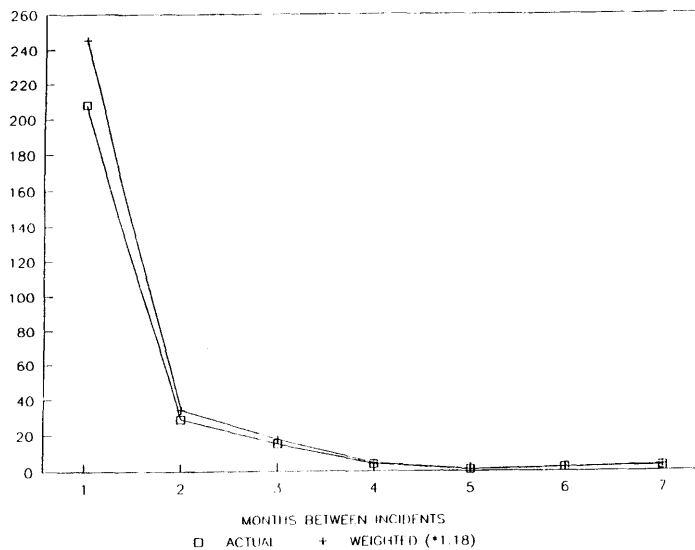
Taken together, the two studies presented data, based on police recorded crime, for a four year period. This remains the largest and most comprehensive study of the time between victimisations. Below are presented three further smaller-scale studies. All

three were carried out in the United Kingdom. One covers property crime and two inter-personal crime. Each of the three uses a different data source. Taken together, the studies suggest some generality in the time course of repeat victimisations.

### School burglary and property crime

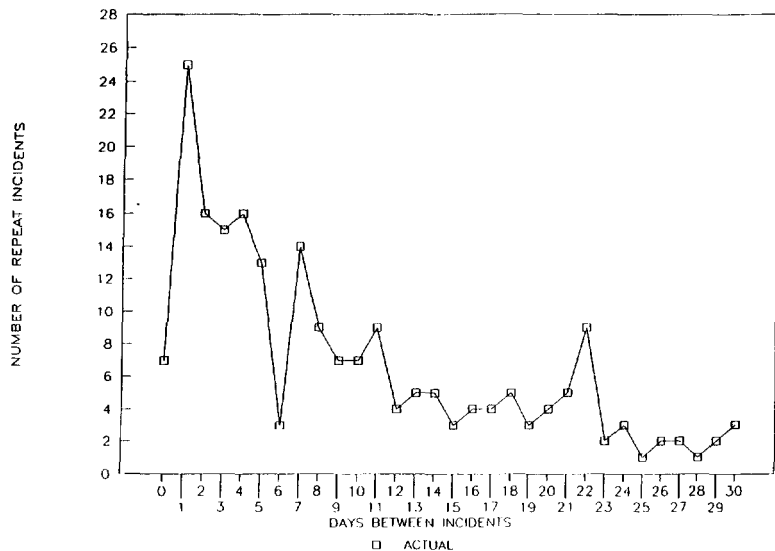
Burquest *et al* (1992) studied recorded crime suffered by thirty three schools on Merseyside in 1990. The crimes were predominantly burglary and serious criminal damage; assaults and other personal crime were excluded. Seven schools reported just one relevant crime, whereas the most victimised school reported 28 crimes in the year. Of the total of 296 crimes reported by all schools combined, 263 (98%) were repeat crimes. Of these, 208 or 79% were revictimisations occurring within one month of a prior victimisation. Figures 1 and 2 show the revictimisation time-course for recorded school property crime. Figure 1 illustrates the decline in the likelihood of revictimisation in the months following a crime. The period of highest risk is readily identifiable as the month after a prior victimisation. Two curves are plotted in Figure 1 - actual crimes, and data weighted to take account of the one year time-period of study. The weighting adjusts for the fact that some schools will have victimisations either immediately before or after the period of observation which may be repeats (or precursors) of crimes captured within the one-year 'window'. It is essential to apply such weighting if one is not to underestimate the steepness of the time course of repeats. Figure 2 shows the likelihood of revictimisation within the first month and how even then it declines sharply with time. Revictimisation is heavily skewed towards the date of the prior victimisation.

**Figure 1: Time-course of Repeat School Crime**  
Grouped 30 day period: Liverpool 1990



**Figure 2: Time-course of Repeat School Crime**

Repeats within 7 days: Liverpool 1990

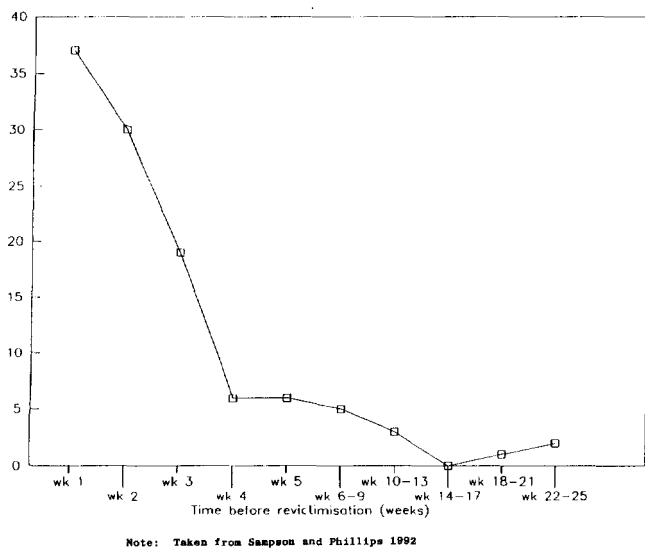


**Racial Attacks**

Sampson and Phillips (1992) studied racial attacks on an estate in the East End of London. The data were generated through weekly interviews over a six month period

**Figure 3: Time-course of Racial revictimisation**

6 months data: Sept 1990-Feb 1991





with Bengali and Somali families on the estate. Of the thirty families in the study, the analysis showed that

“67% of the families were multi-victims... [M]any of the families have experienced attacks before and after this [six month] period. However... within any one time period some families suffered more than others. Seven families reported no incidents during this period. The most heavily victimised family was harassed on average once every six days. The second and third most victimised were attacked on average every nine days. Furthermore, subsequent victimisations were most frequent within the first week of the first attack.” (Sampson and Phillips, 1992; 6)

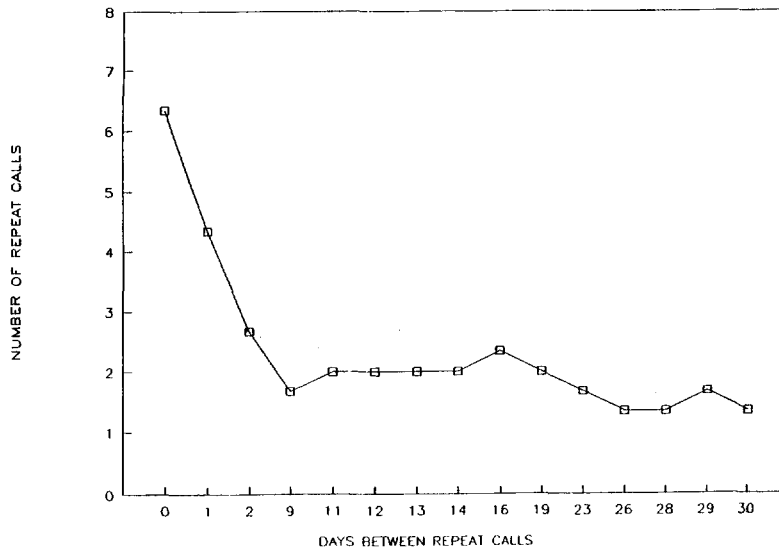
### Domestic Violence

The data presented in Figure 4 below were generated in the initial phase of a Home Office funded crime prevention project which included a detailed study of domestic violence (see Farrell *et al* (1992)). One thousand two hundred and sixty-one calls for service (for any reason) to police over the period 1990-1991, from an area covering approximately 1500 households were analysed, and of these, one hundred and sixty two were classified as domestic disputes. These are relatively small figures, but the curve yielded turns out to be the familiar steep time course.

“[T]here exists a ‘heightened risk period’ for repeat domestic victimisation - when a woman has called the police she is more likely to call them again and

**Figure 4: Time-course of Repeat Domestic Violence**

Calls to Police Feb '89-Mar '91



within a short period of time. A household with one call to the police for a 'domestic' incident has a probability of 0.8 of another within one year. The typical period between incidents is much less than a year. After a first incident, 35 percent of households suffer a second incident within five weeks of the first. After a second incident, 45 percent of households suffer a third incident within five weeks of the second". (Farrell, Clarke and Pease, 1993).

The above examples suggest the generality of the steep time course curve. They are not exhaustive. Evidence from commercial burglary in Northern Ireland also shows a steep curve (Bloomer, in preparation). The extent of repeat victimisation in retail sector crime is suggested to be great by Shapland (in press) and illustrated in Tilley (1993). Even for neighbour disputes, similar trends in the time-course of repeat calls have been found (Sampson and Farrell, in preparation). There are crime types for which the steep time curve is so indisputable as to make analysis otiose. Plastic fraud is perhaps the most obvious example. To maximise profits, once a card is stolen, it must be used as often as possible for a day or two, and then destroyed. Many other kinds of fraud have a window of opportunity, after which continuing to perpetrate the crime invites failure and detection. Table 4 summarises the crime types for which the extent and time-course of repeat victimisation have been revealed to date. The findings suggest the need for further background research associated with each crime type in order to try and develop appropriate crime prevention strategies.

**Table 4: Types of crime with published or to-be-published sources of information on extent and/or time-course of repeat victimisation.**

Crime Type	Reference
1. Residential burglary	Forrester <i>et al</i> (1988,1990), Polvi <i>et al</i> (1990,1991)
2. Domestic violence	Lloyd <i>et al</i> (1993)
3. Neighbour disputes	Sampson and Farrell (in preparation)
4. Racial Attacks	Sampson and Phillips ( 1992)
5. Commercial burglary	Bloomer (in press)
6. Credit card fraud	Levi and Pease (in preparation)
7. Other retail sector crime	Shapland (in press), Tilley, (in press)
8. Total Car Crime	Ellingworth and Pease (in preparation)
9. Obscene Phone Calls	Pease ( 1984), Buck <i>et al</i> (in preparation)

There are other published sources on the extent of domestic violence that are not cited in Table 4. However perhaps only Sherman's (1991) work comes close to a time-course analysis in presenting 'conditional probabilities' of a subsequent call to domestic violence after one or more calls within a year (it is also reassuring that the similar patterns are found by Sherman when using a much larger data set for a whole city in the US). The probability of a subsequent call to police increases with the number of previous calls.

Whilst the entire topic of repeat victimisation, the specifics of individual time-courses and the conditions under which they vary, is under-researched, it seems highly probable that a similar extent and time-course of repeat victimisation would be found for other types of crime not in Table 4.<sup>1</sup>

The above discussion implies that the reasons for the time course of repeat victimisation, and indeed for the phenomenon itself, are various. They have in common only the coincidence of presence of motivated offender and suitable victim, and the absence of a capable guardian. In domestic violence, the victim is trapped in a continuing violent relationship with the offender associated with reluctance of others to intervene in what may be seen as a private matter. In racial attacks, people carry around skin colour and dress which offenders choose to victimise. In plastic fraud, the acquisition of a card represents a transient opportunity which must be exploited to the full. In burglary, the dynamics of repeat victimisation are less transparent. Three possibilities, which are not mutually exclusive, exist:

- (i) It is possible that a first victimisation does not increase the probability of repeat victimisation, but merely flags the high prior probability of victimisation, which is attested again by its suffering a repeat burglary.
- (ii) The same offenders may return to take things they had forgotten the first time, or for which they now have fencing opportunities. Since they know house layout and exit points, problems are less numerous than for the first offence. One hitherto unmentioned effect suggested in the Polvi *et al* research is that there is a risk hump four months after the first burglary. It is tempting to regard this as the return of some burglars after a period which ensures the replacement by insurance of the goods stolen last time.
- (iii) The offenders on the first occasion may tell others of the remaining goods, and those whom they tell return to commit offences.

Of these alternatives, the first can be largely discounted, since the factors which make a house vulnerable to burglary are unlikely to change quickly, so the steep time curve is inexplicable. The second alternative is the most attractive, in part because Dutch research on convicted burglars (Van Althes, cited in Winkel 1991) shows that some 30% do admit to returning to previously victimised dwellings. The third explanation seems an improbably unselfish alternative to the second. Whichever of the three options turns out to be correct, the central point remains that there is a period in which the probability of victimisation is high, and in which preventive or detective action may be taken. If the favoured alternative (repeats by the same

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<sup>1</sup>It has been suggested to the authors that theft of motor vehicles may be an exception. Insofar as they are destroyed or off the road after being recovered, this may be so. However, cars (obviously) reflect their keepers' lifestyles. For this and other reasons, the car thief may have two or more bites at the same (Datsun) Cherry. The question is capable of resolution empirically.

burglars) turns out to be correct, detection of burglars on their second visit is an attractive option in that they are by definition repeat offenders.

Trickett *et al* (1992) broach the important question of whether certain areas have high crime rates because more people are victimised or because there is more revictimisation of the same people. It turns out that high crime areas are primarily so because of the rate of repeat victimisation which characterises them. Other work suggests that it is the rate of revictimisation, rather than changes in victim prevalence, which accounts for changes in area differences between 1982 and 1988 (Trickett *et al* in preparation). Finally, econometric modelling suggests that factors which distinguish victims from non-victims differ from factors which distinguish between single and repeat victims (Hope 1992,1993, Trickett *et al* in preparation). In total, this research suggests that repeat victimisation is crucial in distinguishing high from low crime rate areas, in understanding changes in area differences, and in identifying distinctive risk factors for repeat victimisation.

### **Future Research**

Besides extending the analyses described above to other offences (sexual offences are an obvious next area for study from this perspective), it will be important to examine victim differences which shape the risks of repeat victimisation. The illustrations below come from domestic burglary.

It is not yet known whether the time course of increased risk applies to all dwelling types. The largest study so far was conducted in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, an area of uniformly decent housing by national Canadian and international standards. A study of similar scale as the Saskatoon study should be carried out, concentrating on housing type differences in their time course of revictimisation. If some housing types do not show the same time course, this will give important clues to what is happening. Further, it would be hypothesised that the time course will be less evident in the highest social classes, where, with money little object, and work obligations less rigid so that the householder can stay at home for a few days, swift security uprating and other improvements will reduce the rate of immediate revictimisation.

Finally, the potential role of insurance fraud in repeat victimisations should be clarified. The writers' hunch is that such fraud will not feature among repeats as much as among single victimisations. Surely one would invent a claim carefully so that one would need only one 'burglary'.<sup>1</sup> Two invented burglaries seems to invite trouble. If two were invented, it would be more sensible to wait a decent period after the first before inventing the second, lest a quick second claim stretched the insurer's credulity. In this case, truth may be stranger than insurance fraudsters' fiction. Nonetheless, the possibilities should be investigated – for example that the four-month

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<sup>1</sup>Alternatively, one would inflate the claim from a real burglary so as to preclude the 'need' to invent a burglary in the near future.

bulge does not represent far-sighted burglars returning for a second bite, but householders frustrated by their insurers' response to their first, valid, claim, now inventing a burglary to make up their losses.

One of the avenues for parallel research would be to capitalise on the distinction made in the British Crime Survey between single and series events. For series events, the crimes suffered are of the same kind and presumed by the victim to have been perpetrated by the same offender(s). Analysis of the variation by crime type accounted for by series events will give some clues as to the victim's perspective on the attribution of repeat victimisation. In particular, it would be interesting to determine the proportion of repeated events classified as belonging to series by their victims. Further analysis of repeated car crime using data other than the British Crime Survey would also offer insights into risks which travel around (literally) with victims. Access to insurance data banks would throw light onto the circumstances of repeat victimisations and insurers' responses to them, and allow estimation of the contribution of insurance fraud to repeat victimisation.

A further avenue for future research would be the elaboration of the relationship between repeat offending, repeat victimisation, and crime hot spots. If that relationship were understood, enormous progress could be made in understanding the distribution of crime events and what to do about them.

In general terms, what the present paper sets out to do is to provide a rational basis for crime prevention allocation. The substance of the effort allocated should be a matter for judgement of local causes and circumstances. Research can and should proceed in a search for the more common causes of repeat victimisations, but in the last analysis it cannot determine the cause of repeated instances of a particular crime type with a particular victim. Although much basic and applicable research on this topic remains to be undertaken, (which should explore the parallel issues of high risk of repeat and the time course of the decay of that risk), there is already plenty of material to justify putting the approach to work in preventing crime, and some suggestions of how this might be done will be made in Chapter 4.

Having established the research background, and some of the possible reasons for the topic's failure to feature largely in criminological and police concern, some of the attractions of crime prevention based upon the prevention of repeat victimisation will now be outlined.

### **3. Methodological issues in the study of repeat victimisation**

This chapter represents an attempt to document some of the problems which might be encountered in the study of repeat victimisation. Its purpose is to reduce the number of occasions when practitioners wrongly conclude that 'it doesn't happen here' or 'it doesn't happen now', and the number of occasions when its extent and time-course is calculated wrongly. This is not to say that we believe that the rate of repeats is always elevated. The exceptions will be of particularly great interest. The account below relies primarily upon issues which have been encountered by the authors to date. More problems will no doubt be along later. The measurement and (interpretation of crime rates was covered in chapter 2 of the main text and is not repeated. Issues covered in this chapter involve repeat victimisation and;

1. recorded crime figures
2. police incident log Data
3. crime/victim survey data
4. the study period or 'time window'
5. attempted crime
6. 'eligibility' for revictimisation

Its focus is specifically upon repeat victimisation and does not cover more general methodological issues.

#### **Recorded Crime Data**

The under-reporting of crime to the police is compounded in the case of repeat victimisation. Much crime goes unrecorded since it is unreported. Successive British Crime Surveys have also established that some crime is reported to the police but remains unrecorded. Taking both reasons together, much crime fails to appear in police data banks. This tends to the understatement of the extent of repeat victimisation. For example, a household suffers a burglary. A burglary has roughly a 70% (or 0.7) chance of featuring as a recorded burglary in police statistics. The household suffers a second burglary. That too has roughly a 70% chance of featuring in police statistics. This means that the chance that they have both been recorded is 0.49 or 49% (that is,  $0.7 * 0.7$ ). This means that 49% of households that have been burgled twice will appear twice in police records. 9% ( $0.3 * 0.3$ ) will appear never to have been burgled, and 42% ( $(0.7 * 0.3) + (0.3 * 0.7)$ ) will appear to have been burgled once. With three burglaries at the same address, given the same chance of being recorded, the combinations are set out below in Table 5. This means that 3% of people suffering 3 burglaries will have no burglaries recorded. 19% ( $6.3% + 6.3% + 6.3%$ ) will have one burglary recorded. 44% ( $14.7% + 14.7% + 14.7%$ ) will have two burglaries recorded. Only 34% will have all three burglaries recorded. This analysis is somewhat artificial in regarding each incident as independent. In reality, people who report their first burglary may be more than averagely likely to report their second and

third. Thus the analysis exaggerates the degree of underestimation of repeat victimisation. But it does not invent it. The truth will lie somewhere between small underestimation and underestimation of the extent recorded here.

**Table 5. Probabilities of Recording Repeat Burglaries by Reporting/Recording Practice.**

Burglary 1	Burglary 2	Burglary 3	Prob =	Probability	No. of Burglarys Recorded
Not Rep	Not Rep	Not Rep	.3*.3*.3	.027	0
Not Rep	Not Rep	Rep	.3*.3*.7	.063	1
Not Rep	Rep	Not Rep	.3*.7*.3	.063	1
Rep	Not Rep	Not Rep	.7*.3*.3	.063	1
Not Rep	Rep	Rep	.3*.7*.7	.147	2
Rep	Not Rep	Rep	.7*.3*.7	.147	2
Rep	Rep	Not Rep	.7*.7*.3	.147	2
Rep	Rep	Rep	.7*.7*.7	.343	3

### Police Incident Logs

Incident logs are records of calls for police service, usually from the public. They are recorded for operational purposes but have been used as a source of data by many researchers, (eg Sherman *et al* (1989); Sampson (1990)). The first of these used incident logs in the analysis of crime 'hot spots' and describes counting and analysis problems similar to those discussed here.

The first important point with respect to incident logs is that in some instances they may give a more accurate indicator of the extent of repeat victimisation than recorded crimes. This may be particularly true for crimes like domestic violence. Most domestic violence does not get recorded as a criminal offence. However, incident logs give one, albeit imperfect, indicator of the ongoing nature of domestic violence when repeat calls to the same addresses are analysed. Obviously this is not perfect since it has been suggested that a woman has, on average, experienced violence thirty-five times before calling the police (cited in Horley, 1988). It is despite this imperfection that incident logs display distinct patterns of repeat calls. Incident logs were the initial source of data in the Merseyside Domestic Violence Project (Lloyd *et al* 1993 ). In this work, the incident log data were transferred on disk from the police mainframe computer to a personal computer for analysis using SPSS-PC, a standard data analysis package. The major drawback for the analysis of repeat calls to a household was that addresses are not necessarily recorded in the same format each time by police dispatchers – a fact which is not over important for police use, but was fundamental to this research. Computers do not recognise the same address if it is spelt differently in any way (some computer software packages may have a 'like' facility for similar spellings, but not for

data analysis, and in this instance it may lead to additional counting problems). For an example of the problem, these six fictional address records are all calls to the same address, but a computer recognises them all as separate addresses:

- (1) 77 Davenport Avenue
- (2) 77 Davenport Ave, M20
- (3) 77 Davenport Ave.
- (4) 77, Davenport Ave.
- (5) 77, Davenport Avenue
- (6) 77 DAVENPORT AVE.

There are many more variations which can occur, and even the difference of a comma, a space, an abbreviation, a spelling or a difference between upper and lower case, may be enough for the computer to read them as separate addresses. In the Merseyside project, calls were sorted (SORT command in SPSS) by address, and then discrepancies were edited where they obviously referred to the same address. These were re-sorted, and further editing conducted. Several iterations of the sorting and editing procedure were necessary. This was found to be a lengthy but necessary process. It reduces the falsely high number of 'single-incident calls' and brings the number of 'repeat-calls' closer to the actual number. When results are aggregated, this procedure can make a huge difference to the findings.

A further point to note with respect to incident logs is that some events are not located to an address. An episode which may be a repeat call to an address may just be recorded as a call to the street name. These 'unlocated' calls will increase the apparent number of single incidents at the expense of their true status as repeat occurrences.

### **Crime Survey Data**

It has long been stressed in British Crime Survey analyses that risks of crime are very unevenly distributed across the population. If risks were spread randomly, the number of people victimised once, twice, three times etc. would follow a Poisson distribution and could be readily derived from the total number of crimes committed. The BCS and other research has clearly established that, for several reasons, crime risks are clustered. The risks of a house being burgled increase, for example, with:- proximity to motivated offenders; ease of access and egress; potential yield; lack of capable guardians. It has been established, for example, that a privately-owned affluent end-of terrace house located next to a rough inner city council estate and routinely left empty during the day runs a very high risk of burglary indeed; and it would be unlikely that the annual burglary rate for such houses was below the rate experienced nationally by burgled households in the twelve months following victimisation – ie. the rates at which they experienced subsequent burglaries.

Some of the problems of survey data in relation to multiple victimisation are highlighted in the excellent paper by Hazel Genn (1988). Genn notes that that:

- (i) Many analyses of the British Crime Survey place an 'artificial upper limit' on the number of criminal incidents that a person could report to the survey as a



series. A series of incidents was usually given an artificial upper limit of five, regardless of whether this was one of five or fifty incidents.

- (ii) A limit was also placed on the number of series of incidents which could be reported. Each series of incidents was recorded on a questionnaire called a 'victim form'. However, any one respondent could only complete up to four victim forms. This is not limited to the BCS. The first author worked on a survey which placed an artificial limitation of six victim forms upon a respondent, as well as failing to account for several other of the aspects considered here (see Sampson and Farrell, 1990).

A further problem of crime survey data is the absence of accurate date and time of repeated incidents of crime. This makes it difficult to determine the length of time between victimisations.

The presentation of these limitations are not meant to belittle the enormous contribution which crime surveys have made to criminological research and knowledge. The British Crime Survey has dispelled many myths about crime, shed light on others, and opened up many new areas to research. It will make an important continuing contribution to British criminological research. Some recent analyses of British Crime Survey data have attempted to overcome the problem of the artificial limit placed on data through the use of victim forms by using the 'filter' or screening questions which record the initial responses to questions about the amount of crime. Whilst these are themselves not without problems they may go some way towards indicating the extent of repeat victimisation.

### **The 'time window' in the study of the time-course**

A study of crime in an area for a one week period will show virtually no repeat victimisation. This is because crimes which are noted during the observed week may be repeats of crime the week before, or may be precursors of crimes in the subsequent week. Even though some of the crimes are in fact repeat crimes or linked to future repeat crimes, by research of this kind they are observed as 'single-incident' crimes. Even if there are only six days between one incident and the next, only those where the prior crime took place on the first day of the study would have the repeat recorded as such.

Repeat victimisation is therefore under-counted, and single-incident crimes are over-counted. The extent of the problem of the 'time-window' of the research is proportional to the length of the period of observation. A study with a long reporting or recording period – perhaps several years of crime with dates and times of occurrence – will have virtually excluded this problem. A study with a very short time period has this problem acutely. In the study of schools burglary and property crime mentioned in chapter 2, this problem was tackled using a simple weighting formula to account for the under-estimate (Burquest *et al* 1992).

### **Attempted Crime**

In victim surveys, the inclusion or exclusion of attempted crime may have important effects upon the findings with respect to repeat victimisation. This is not presented here as a statement of fact but as an hypothesis, and an area which needs further study. Is an attempted crime more or less likely to be repeated than a completed crime? It has not, to the authors' knowledge, been the object of any repeat victimisation research. Rates of repeat victimisation for attempted crimes may vary greatly by type of crime. For example, a frustrated burglary attempt may be deflected to a different target. Conversely, attempted rapes and murders may be excellent predictors of completed rapes and murders. This may be particularly so when victim and offender are known to each other. Whilst very few rapes are reported, the volume has increased in recent years. It might be the subject of empirical study. Given the necessary background research, it could be one uncharted area in which a preventive approach might develop.

### **'Eligibility' for Revictimisation**

By definition, in order for revictimisation to take place it is necessary for the target or victim to exist and be 'eligible' for revictimisation. The extent to which this does not take place needs to be considered in calculating the rate of repeat victimisation. Repeated murder victimisation is impossible. The same person cannot be killed twice (except perhaps James Bond). Laycock and Webb (1992) show that the proportion of cars which are stolen and not recovered has increased over two decades so that this is now the fate which befalls about one-third of cars taken. This spectacularly reduces the maximum repeat victimisation which can occur. The extent of repeat victimisation must be assessed in relation to the vehicles remaining eligible for repeat victimisation. Cars which are badly damaged as a result of crime may be 'written-off' or otherwise off-the-road for a prolonged period. During this time they are not eligible for repeat victimisation. Cars which move between areas or are sold on to a different owner (which could be more likely after victimisation) might not have repeated victimisations traced to them even if they were repeatedly victimised. A similar pattern of the systematic over- representation of single-incident victimisations and the under-counting of repeat victimisation would be the outcome if eligibility factors are not considered. Whilst here it largely takes the form of a hypothesis of methodological considerations, it could form a further interesting prospect for future research during the development of a car crime prevention programme.

## 4. Prioritising Crime Prevention: The Potential of Repeat Victimization

The Kirkholt burglary prevention project (Forrester et al 1988a, 1988b, 1990, Pease, 1991a, 1991b) has a special place in applied repeat victimisation research. The research phase of that project combined interviews with known (detained) burglars, with burglary victims and their neighbours, and the analysis of available burglary data, to find that,

“once a house has been burgled, its chance of repeat victimisation was four times the rate of houses that had not been burgled at all” (Forrester *et al* 1988b: 22)

Whilst housing was of a type which nationally had a medium burglary rate (Hough and Mayhew, 1985), the Kirkholt estate had a recorded burglary rate double that for both recorded and unrecorded burglary for a high crime housing type. Crucially, nearly half of those households burgled in December 1986 had been burgled earlier in the year. On Kirkholt and places like it, the prevention of revictimisation would prevent most burglary within one calendar year.<sup>1</sup>The motif of the Kirkholt Project was the prevention of revictimisation by all locally appropriate means. Recognition of this point is crucial. The Kirkholt approach was not one single method or technique to prevent burglary. It was a package of measures which united under the general banner ‘the prevention of revictimisation’. This is to be contrasted with an approach which has previously been described as ‘the cult of the window lock’, where off-the-shelf measures are taken without reference to how the offence happened and how it could happen after measures were taken.

The specifics of the Kirkholt approach are readily accessible elsewhere, and will not be repeated here. None of the techniques used in that project was extraordinary. The most original was the focused or cocoon neighbourhood watch. The real innovation lay in the application of existing knowledge in a different context: that of the prevention of repeat victimisation. The Kirkholt project later prompted Pease (1991a,b) to conclude that the prevention of revictimisation might be an attractive general crime prevention strategy. The approach would have certain advantages, expressed as:

- “ - Attention to dwellings or people already victimised has a higher ‘hit rate’ of those likely to be victimised in the future.
- Preventing repeat victimisation protects the most vulnerable social groups, without having to identify those groups as such, which can be socially divisive. Having been victimised already probably represents the least contentious basis for a claim to be given crime prevention attention.

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<sup>1</sup>Violent personal crimes are sometimes committed against workers in businesses, either in the course of a property crime or not. The effects of these can be quite traumatic. This study does not address that important issue (see Hibberd and Shapland 1993).

- Repeat victimisation is highest, both absolutely and proportionately, in the most crime-ridden areas (Trickett *et al* 1991), which are also the areas that suffer the most serious crime (Pease, 1988). The prevention of repeat victimisation is thus commensurately more important the greater an area's crime problem.
- The rate of victimisation offers a realistic schedule for crime prevention activity. Preventing repeat victimisation is a way of "drip-feeding" crime prevention.
- Even from the unrealistic view that crime is only displaced, avoiding repeat victimisation at least shares the agony around (see Barr and Pease, 1990,1)."<sup>1</sup> (Pease, 1991a; p76).

The 'drip-feeding' of crime prevention was an analogy created to suggest that targeting repeat victimisation is more practically viable – it is spread through time, and hence less labour intensive and easier to maintain.

To the above advantages may be added the increase in detection potential which attends repeat victimisation. If police and others know when and where there is a high probability of crime, they can take special measures to prevent it. Detection is a major method of crime prevention, yet the conventional vocabulary of crime prevention tends to exclude its consideration. One of the bonuses of the approach advocated is the explicit integration of prevention and detection strategies.

The time-course analysis has major implications for achieving the cost-effectiveness of preventive action. Response to victimisation must be swift and can be transient.<sup>1</sup>

### **Quick and Transient Response:**

Resources must be mobilised immediately following victimisation. From the time-course analysis, for maximum preventive effect, they must be in place within twenty four hours. After victimisation there exists a 'heightened risk period' for revictimisation. The risk declines with time as the time-course smooths out at a low-level of revictimisation, and so a late response is less efficient to the point of uselessness. Better late than never is not a cliché which applies here. Quick response may present some logistical difficulties at first which will be more than worth the effort to overcome until they are routinised.

If the risk of revictimisation declines rapidly with time, maximum efficiency would be achieved through reallocating resources as risk declines. If the crime prevention

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<sup>1</sup>Berry and Carter (1992) suggest that the effects of conventional crime prevention programmes tend to be transient. Sherman (1990) shows this also to be true of the crime preventive effects of police crackdowns. The transience of crime prevention effects does not really matter if the risks of victimisation are themselves transient, and this seems to be the case after first victimisation.

resource is, for example, a portable alarm, then it can be placed in one location immediately following victimisation. When the risk of revictimisation declines, the resource could be relocated to a different 'high risk' location. Temporary measures moved rapidly into place will achieve maximum preventive efficiency. Returns on investment will be greatest where this occurs, being both high and stable over time (due to reallocation).

The principles of this approach have been incorporated into a recent programme to prevent repeat domestic violence by ex-partners in a part of Liverpool. Its effects are still under evaluation, but it has already led to arrests, feelings of increased safety, and improved police-victim relationships (see Farrell *et al* 1992 for an early report).

## **Objections to the Repeat Victimization Approach**

### **1. Everyone a Victim – Once**

A revictimisation prevention policy, by definition, is designed to act after a crime has taken place. Criminals get 'one free go' at every target. This would be a reasonable criticism if crime prevention resources were adequate to protect all places and people. Given limited public resources, it makes less sense. Moreover, people at lesser risk are free and encouraged to take their own prevention measures.

A related criticism is that when repeat victimisation is prevented, the prevalence of victimisation might increase. This is the old displacement argument. Recent research has suggested that displacement (the movement of crime to new places and people) is often offset by the 'free-rider' or 'diffusion of benefits' effect, whereby a programme has preventive gains which extend beyond the places or people directly protected (see Clarke 1993). Further, any detections which take place may make offenders unwilling or unavailable to commit offences against new targets. In sum, the displacement issue should be given attention, but is not likely seriously to threaten, and is more likely to enhance the total crime preventive effect of an approach concentrating on the prevention of repeat victimisation.

### **2. The 'problem' of low crime prevalence.**

Based on the research to date, there will be least revictimisation in areas with the lowest crime rates, and within crime types of lowest prevalence. However, areas with apparently 'general' low crime prevalence may still have high rates of particular types of revictimisation. A specific example would be domestic violence, which cuts across social class and a variety of identifiable criminogenic factors (Smith, 1989). Some crimes of low prevalence may nonetheless be likely to be repeated. The most obvious case would be crimes where the victim-offender relationship makes it likely that it will be repeated: for instance assault on a potential witness by an offender and his or her friends.

Finally, it should be stated that the criticism of neglect of low crime areas by the strategy advocated is in any case spurious. Reducing relative attention given to places and people in least need of it is a desirable aspect of the approach under consideration.

### 3. The wilful victim?

It has been suggested that the method advocated in some way blames the victim by implying “if only you had behaved otherwise, the crime might never have taken place.” Yet it seems no more offensive to reduce repeat crime victimisations than repeat heart attacks, by attention to both lifestyle and monitoring procedures which were not hitherto available to the victim. National Health Service facilities are not denied to those suffering a fourth heart attack who had failed to give up smoking or lose weight after any of the first three, but the effort to induce lifestyle changes are surely defensible in both contexts. Fundamentally, the blame for crime lies with the perpetrator, not the victim. The tendency to blame victims, highlighted by unwise judicial pronouncements when sentencing sex offenders, is to be avoided. However, the wish to avoid blaming victims generally should not lead us to mask the fact some individuals and organisations do behave in ways which contribute to the likelihood of their own victimisation. Organisations may do so because it is economically rational to tolerate a degree of victimisation (see Burrows 1992). Individuals do so because they are unable or unwilling to make changes to a lifestyle which would reduce their risks of victimisation.

Imagine that all trouble in a town centre in the evenings centres on a particular pub, whose layout, ambience, decor and staff all ‘invite’ violence. Often the victim of damage or assault is the publican him/herself. Consider a supermarket whose layout ‘invites’ repeat shop theft and then consumes police resources in helping to prevent it. Consider the individual whose lack of social skills leads him or her to be in situations in which assault is suffered. In none of these examples is the crime the victim’s *fault*. In all of them, victim behaviour contributes to crime risks. Focussing on the prevention of repeat victimisation means these problems would have to be confronted. For instance, does the pub or the store have unlimited access to public resources in police and court processing of offences and offenders? This is the most valid and difficult problem by which the perspective is confronted.

What must be recalled is that this is not a problem of the approach, but a problem highlighted by the approach. The development of a repertoire of approaches to the wilful victim (or the application of a repertoire which already exists) only becomes a priority task under a repeat victimisation prevention strategy, despite the fact that it was always a problem.

Asserting that the problem should not be laid at the door of the strategy advocated does not solve it. Licensing laws, provision of police service to chronically victimised stores, pressure from traders’ organisations, and perhaps individual counselling of chronic victims are at least some of the approaches to the problem. Insofar as commercial enterprises can be shown the amount lost through crime and *commercially advantageous* ways of reducing it, a crime prevention motive can be augmented (Burrows 1991). In insurance practice, devices like no claims discounts and co-insurance are methods of motivating personal crime prevention (Litton 1989). Changes to rules about responsibility for losses through plastic fraud will adjust

motivations to prevent it (Levi 1991). However, many of these schemes occur more plausibly at the national level, and crimes which the victim has little motive or capacity to prevent but which incur public costs remain a source of particular difficulty. Working through this difficulty should perhaps be the major task of the attempt to implement the strategy experimentally in a police sub-division, an experiment advocated below.

### **How to Do it**

In what follows, the writers set out their ideas for putting the perspective to work in crime prevention more generally. The ideas are by no means exhaustive of the possibilities. A reader persuaded by the foregoing and unpersuaded by what follows is invited to consider alternatives. It is assumed in what follows that the separation of victim support and crime prevention is wholly artificial. One of the best forms of victim support is crime prevention, and the function of help in response to the last victimisation and prevention of the next are properly indivisible. This has implications for the relationship between police and victim support. There is obviously co-operation now, but what is suggested takes that to a wholly new type and level, following from recognition of the indivisibility of the job to be done.

(i) The first step is locally to establish the patterns of repeat victimisation prevailing in as much detail as the current police command and control system will permit. For example, it would be helpful to establish which dwelling types in which areas are vulnerable to repeats over what period. This would inform the allocation of probabilities in stage (ii).

(i) Armed with the best available indication of local repeat victimisation risks, policy needs to be established as to what probability threshold combined with what offence type should trigger what level of intervention. More serious offences may be assigned a lower probability of recurrence to trigger preventive effort. For instance, consider an area in which, after a domestic burglary, the probability of a repeat within six weeks is 10%. In the same area, the chance of repeat vandalism to a car is 20%. Given the greater seriousness of burglary, effort may be assigned to the burglaries over the car damage. There may come a point where the priorities are reversed (for example, if the probability of a fourth car damage within six weeks of a third were 60%) when effort might be expended on the prevention of a fourth car vandalism over the prevention of a second burglary. There are in fact at least three variables in the equation: probability of repeat, seriousness of offence repeated, and cost per preventive effort for the crime concerned. A set of local priorities taking these factors into account would have to be agreed, and could properly be a matter of local public consultation. The writers are currently trying to develop a model policy along these lines.

Ideally, the phase of priority setting would be unnecessary, since resources would be available for the prevention of all repeats. The Scylla and Charybdis here are, on the one hand, trying to prevent all repeats and being uniformly inadequate in doing so, and on the other preventing so few highly probable repeats that most citizens are no

better protected than they were before. One of the advantages of going for very highly probable repeats is that these may be the crimes where detection would have the highest crime prevention yield, given the likelihood of the same offender(s) being involved. Some of the principles and procedures described by Johnston *et al* (1993) are applicable in this context.

(iii) In general terms, the repertoire of preventive measures to be put in place should be agreed and made available locally. Most of these will be standard and inexpensive. For example, domestic burglary prevention may involve cocooning by neighbour watch, security uprating, postcoding, possibly the *loan* of a portable intruder alarm and video to identify intruders in a way usable in evidence, and advice about leaving signs of occupancy. Unpublished results from the British Crime Survey suggest that car crime is even more concentrated in terms of rates of revictimisation than personal and other property crime (Ellingworth, personal communication). As a means of prevention Sherman (1992: 38) writes of the introduction of 'Lo-Jack' car tracking devices that trace cars and have increased both car recoveries and offender detection in Massachusetts. The combination suggested would run thus: a pool of car tracking devices would be rotated between vehicles perceived to be at high risk (ie. just after a victimisation or of a type known to be stolen to order). Even if there were not enough alarms for all cars to be tracked after victimisation, as Sherman notes with respect to offenders and the possibilities for crackdowns, "By keeping them guessing, we may have better luck at keeping them honest." (1990: 44). Officers deployed to the scene of an activation of an intruder alarm or car locator would know that it was a silent signal and that they might catch an offender unawares. The control room monitoring a set of silent alarms on loan to locations at high risk of revictimisation would in effect constitute an 'offence monitoring unit'. It would only be called into action when criminal activity takes place. The monitoring of offenders by other means is tedious and expensive. Sherman (1992) writes of the Washington, D.C. Repeat Offender Project (ROP), involving seventy (70) officers, that "it began with the goal of focusing constant surveillance on stranger robbers, but couldn't identify enough of them to stay busy", and continues,

"The [repeat robbers] they did identify had the unfortunate habit of going home at night and staying there for 12 to 16 hours, which made surveillance extremely expensive and very boring. ROP officers wound up making more 'serendipitous' arrests while watching their targets than actual arrests of the targets". (Sherman, 1992: 18)

Based upon a constant supply of repeat offences, a whole police division of offenders could be monitored in the course of the everyday activities of a single control room. In the Washington Repeat Offender Project, there was a consistent input of labour (twenty four hour, day after day) regardless of the extent of criminal activity. The monitoring mechanism (ie. the officers involved) cost the same amount in labour for the long periods of inactivity as for periods of activity. Based on the revictimisation phenomenon and the loan of silent alarms, human resources would only need to be



allocated to sites of known potential offender activity when an alarm is activated. The expected outcomes of this for crime prevention would be doubly efficient per unit of labour expended through the prevention of revictimisation and the increased likelihood of apprehension of offenders. The approach is, further, liable to none of the moral objections which attend offender entrapment.

Offender detection and apprehension is one form of crime prevention. However, other than implicitly, it does not traditionally overlap with a concern for the victim. To the extent that offender detection could be driven by revictimisation it would encompass both. Implementation of crime prevention initiatives is by no means easy (see Laycock, in preparation). In policing, as in all walks of life, the extent to which something is implemented and overseen will depend upon self interest. Policing is traditionally assessed on arrest rates, not on rates of crime prevention. If offender detection and the prevention of revictimisation could be combined, the rewards would be greater for all concerned. The victim would receive a superior crime prevention service if there were an element of a *tangible* return to those who put it into place. The potential detection and apprehension of an offender would produce a more efficient crime prevention service than the potential securing of a future non-event. The symbiotic relationship which could develop between preventing revictimisation and offender detection (symbiotic because the 'attractive' aspect — offender detection could not take place without the crime prevention aspect) could be fruitful.

Experience, better data, and ingenuity will improve the repertoire. However, originality for its own sake is not valuable. What is intended is the conversion of what is now a gesture towards the prevention of crime in the wake of an offence into the whole burden of crime prevention effort. It may well be that there is an extensive role for the Special Constabulary in this process (see point (v) below).

(iv) The next step would be to establish intra-police communication so that whoever is tasked with preventing repeat victimisation gets details of the prior event very quickly. This could involve all cases in the category agreed for intervention being automatically copied to the terminal or directory of the officer(s) so tasked. This could in principle be done when a command and control message is created on computer, but the practical problems in the way of this most efficient way of doing things should not be minimised.

(v) The delivery system for the prevention task should be elaborated. This could perhaps involve an expansion of the role for the Special Constabulary, involving substantial and continuing crime prevention training in relation to the area policed. The overlap between victim support and crime prevention could be reflected in organisational arrangements. One way of doing this would be to create Special Constable/victim support volunteers to work in tandem, to satisfy the dual preventive/emotional needs of crime victims. Alternatively, it could involve direct meshing of the roles, with volunteer Special Constables being given training in victim support, and perhaps some victim support workers being encouraged to enrol as Special Constables, so that the duality of role comes to be fulfilled by the same individual.

(vi) If it becomes routinised, the prevention of repeats represents the most elegant measure of police performance imaginable. It is entirely unfair to use crime prevalence as a measure of police performance, since the engines of crime generally lie outside anything the police could or should hope to influence. Similarly, it is unfair to blame the National Health Service for the prevalence of heart attack victims. However, the reporting of crime invokes public costs and legitimate social concern. At that point, there is scope for help and persuasion to change the future. The elegance comes from the fact that a performance measure of that kind would automatically direct police attention to individuals and areas where the incidence of crime is greatest to change the future; it is at that point that performance measures become meaningful. It also makes detection of persistent offenders a high-g geared way of achieving performance targets. It would be naive to regard any single performance indicator as sufficient. However, the prevention of repeat victimisation deserves serious consideration in this context as a central measure, just as the delay or prevention of heart attacks after a first may be one index of the success of cardiology.

(vii) The next step could be the development of a test-bed for the approach outlined above. What is proposed is that one sub-division in an urban area be given over to an experiment in which crime prevention effort is devoted exclusively to the prevention of repeat victimisation.<sup>1</sup> In this way solutions could be developed to the tricky problems of wilful victimisation, and the repertoire of techniques could be extended. In the light of the experience, and hopefully parallel development of the research base of repeat victimisation, a decision would be reached about whether or how to expand crime prevention through stopping repeat victimisation.

## Endnote

The aspirations to model crime prevention strategy on the research reported may be seen as grandiose and premature. The reasons for repeats are diverse, the data on repeat victimisation is incomplete, and the range of techniques to combat it are not fully elaborated. However, the attractions of the approach are so great that its early realisation in experimental form is not an unreasonable aspiration. The expenditure on the development of such an approach would be but a drop in the ocean of current expenditure on less efficient approaches. At worst, the development of this approach will clarify the reasons why crime prevention effort is currently so badly misdirected. At best, it will provide a prioritisation for crime prevention effort which permits its optimal deployment. To be optimistic about the future, a productive CPO team based around the detection and prevention of revictimisation could be an enviable posting. It remains to be seen how well the grease can work when applied to a variety of severe squeaks.

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<sup>1</sup>There will still be meetings to address, but these engagements would not be encouraged. This type of work should perhaps even go to other officers, along the lines of the security survey (see Johnson *et al*, 1993).

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