Repeat victimisation: offenders accounts

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Repeat Victimisation: 
Offender Accounts

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and Ken Pease

The repeated victimisation of the same people and places has recently assumed 
prominence in our analysis and understanding of crime, although its full implications for 
crime and criminal justice practice have yet to be acknowledged. A sample of officially 
processed burglars were interviewed. It was found that repeated offending against the same 
target was common, and characteristic of those most confirmed in a criminal career. It 
shows that an offender’s tendency to commit repeated offences against the same target 
tends to cross crime types, and that the reasons are typically rational, even viewable as 
common sense. It suggests that change or presumed change in a target is the primary factor 
which reduces repetition.

Key Words: Repeat victimisation; offenders’ perspectives; crime victims

Introduction

In recent years, the concentration of victimisation on the same people and places 
has come to be recognised as a fundamental fact about crime and as a major opportunity 
for its prevention. This recognition has been described as the most important criminological 
insight of the decade. Alongside the build-up of data about crime concentration has come a 
series of demonstration projects which show that crime, particularly property crime, can be 
reduced by preventing repeats. Prioritising the prevention of repeats may prove a good way 
of reducing both the volume of crime and (incidentally) the inequality of its distribution. 
Why might this be so? The prevention of repeat victimisation directs resources to the places and 
people where victimisation is most likely in the near future. It also deploys them in areas of 
high crime, since areas suffer a high volume of crime because of differences in the rates at 
which people and places are chronically victimised. The prevention of repeats provides 
a focus and a pace for implementing crime prevention that are in general difficult to 
achieve (the drip-feeding effect).

The place of repeat victimisation as a tactic in crime prevention now seems secure, with the 
establishment of a Home Office Task Force to advance its recognition, its incorporation as a 
police Key Performance Indicator, and growing interest and research in the USA, Sweden and 
Australia. It has other fundamental implications, for instance in changing the way
in which crime statistics are collected and presented. Crime concentration (the number of victimisations per victim) must in future be considered alongside prevalence (the number of victims per head of population) and incidence (the number of victimisations per head of population). Neglect of this has led to the failure to recognise how unequally the burden of crime is borne, and has obscured the self-evident priorities for prevention which flow from that.

Repeat victimisation and criminal and victim processing

Repeat victimisation has implications for criminal justice and for victim support. It is to implications for offender processing that the next wave of repeat victimisation research will be directed. Generally, repeat victimisation shifts the perception of an offence away from that of a random occurrence to that of the manifestation of a relationship, however perverse and undesired by at least one of the parties that relationship is.

The last 20 years has seen a movement towards recognising abusive relationships as criminal. Domestic violence and child abuse by intimates demanded an alternative way of considering crime victimisation. By contrast, other crime types still tend to be seen as one-off events. If much crime involves the same victim and same offender, there are many implications. Detection is facilitated, since the police will concentrate on those who previously offended against a victim. The role of victim support changes to incorporate crime prevention (see below). The role of mediation and reparation is enlarged. Offence-focused work in probation may properly be directed at the relationships with victims which facilitate offence repetition. To the extent to which these relationships are concentrated in particular communities, the role of communitarian responses to crime may be focused more precisely.

In exploratory work, advantage was taken of a question in the British Crime Survey which addresses the question of whether the offence was of the same type, done in the same way and 'probably' by the same perpetrators. Put

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime type</th>
<th>No. of crimes</th>
<th>Series/repeats (%)</th>
<th>Series/total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle theft</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft from vehicle</td>
<td>1649</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to vehicle</td>
<td>1783</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle theft</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary with loss</td>
<td>842</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break-in with damage</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted burglary</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft from dwelling</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft from outside dwelling</td>
<td>923</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to outside dwelling</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft from person</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted theft from person</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other theft</td>
<td>1187</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to personal property</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>1824</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats</td>
<td>1616</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

simply, how much crime involves repeated similar events 'probably' by the same person? Table 1 summarises the results. It will be seen that most repetitions are series events. That is to say, when a person is victimised by the same type of crime more than once, those events tend to be very similar, and attributed to the same perpetrator. For crimes of violence in particular, series events account not just for most of the repeats, but most of all crime suffered. Looking at assault, the reader will see that 59 per cent of all violent crime is not a one-off event, but forms part of a series. The qualifier 'probably' by the same person is least necessary for assaults, which are the crimes where the victim is most likely to see the perpetrator, so we can say with confidence that most assaultive crime consists of series of similar events involving the same assailant(s) and the same victim.

Offender targeting

So far unpublished research by Inspector Steve Everson of West Yorkshire Police suggests that the people committing crime against the same target are primarily the same offenders, i.e. a second offence against the same target is overwhelmingly committed by the same person or group which committed the first. Further, these tend to be the more prolific offenders. Thus, even if the proportion of crimes detected remains constant, detecting those who commit repeat crimes will prevent more crime by deterrence, incapacitation and possibly offender change than would a more conventional approach.

What is clearly necessary is a raft of research in which offenders are asked about repetition. Such research is just beginning to appear. Research of this kind will clarify the role which repeat victimisation might play in offender targeting.

One contentious issue is whether repeat victimisation flags risk or increases risk. Even now, it seems possible to confirm that victimisation increases risk of further victimisation, rather than merely flagging high-risk places and people. This is a point which can be confirmed by research with offenders.

If it is their experience during a first offence against a given target which makes its repetition likely, then clearly victimisation increases risk. By this account, the day after a crime, a crime is more likely than before its occurrence. The importance of this for preventive strategy is difficult to overstate.

Victim support

Repeat victimisation has enormous implications for the practice of victim support. A long-standing criticism of police responses to repeat victims is the lack of communication between officers. Ideally, each officer attending knows the history of events at a particular address. In practice, this is far from true. This is no less true of victim support volunteers. One could argue that the victim support database should ensure that each volunteer knows the full extent of what has been experienced, across visits. If it is possible for the same volunteer to attend repeated incidents against the same person, this would at least provide organisational recognition of the reality of chronic victimisation. These organisational changes seem necessary to optimise the service to troubled victims. The extent of the victim support role in helping prevent repeat victimisation is more contentious and remains to be fully debated.

Probation

Why should probation officers be interested in repeat victimisation? It is clear that some officers involved in the exercise reported below regarded it as something of an indulgence by West Yorkshire Probation Service to become involved in this work, so the case needs to be made.

* Offence-focused work. Such work is now central in probation practice. It is difficult to see how this approach can be well-founded without some attention to the linkages between offences. Offence-focused work which regards suitable victims as interchangeable (which in our view comprises the bulk of such work, with the exception of offences like domestic violence
and incest, where the relationship is
unavoidably central) misses the point
insofar as particular victims are repeatedly
targetted. The officer practising such work
could be charged with naivety.

- **Mediation-reparation.** Repeated
victimisation of the same target suggests
either malice against or callous indifference
to the suffering of the same people.
Arguably, the shame which should attend
repetition should be greater than would be
the case for one-off victimisation.
Exploration of previous victimisation
involving the same parties is a necessary
condition of the process being honest from
the offender's point of view. Reintegrative
shaming (a priori) more powerful when
the true extent of repetition is
acknowledged.

- **Practical arrangements.** If offending is
concentrated on the same victim (or even
small area) this should arguably be taken
into account in the solicitation of victim
impact statements, location of Community
Service placements, the question of who
should be notified or patrolled when tagged
offenders break their curfew, who should
be notified of offender release, and the like.
The presumption of equal risk should not
underpin the ways in which punishment is
dispensed and communicated.

**The project in hand**

In the research reported here, offenders
officially processed for at least one burglary
and in statutory contact with the West Yorkshire
Probation Service during October-November
1996 were invited to complete a questionnaire
in which they were asked whether they had ever
repeated crimes against the same target (person
or place). The questionnaire had been piloted
on all those coming onto orders for a two-week
period earlier that summer. This pilot survey
had led to modifications of the questionnaire
and measures to ensure that officers did invite
those whom they supervised and who were
eligible to complete the questionnaire.
Offenders eligible were those meeting the
burglary criterion under supervision at the
Huddersfield and Dewsbury offices, including
those attending a Day Centre as a condition of
Probation, or on a Community Service Order
from the same offices, or on a Combination
Order administered from those offices, or on
remand or under sentence at Armley Prison,
Leeds, with a home address such as would lead
them to be supervised by those offices. The
questionnaire sample comprised 173 men and
13 women, with a mean age of 25.9, and
standard deviation of 7.8 years.

In the event, officers are believed, from
conversation and office differences in number
of questionnaires completed, to have varied in
their rates of return. In the light of this, we
cannot claim that the sample was representative
of those for whom the Probation Service had
responsibility during the period in question.
Even if officer collaboration had been
complete, there are other reasons why the
questionnaire would not represent the actions
of the population of recently active offenders
with burglary in their records. Notably:

- Those who failed to fulfil their appointments
would be excluded.

- Those sentenced to short prison sentences
or on remand and subsequently acquitted
would be under-represented, because of
their release before interview.

- Participants may be inclined to understate
their involvement in undetected crime to a
probation officer, who is after all an officer
of the court.

Thus, the sample is biased through variation
in officer participation and in the exigencies of
the situation. The net effect of the last-named
bias is almost certainly to underestimate the
criminal activity of the participants. A final
point which must be made concerns the
consequences of not asking respondents the
total number of offences of each type they had
committed. The questionnaire successfully
identified many repeat offenders, but it did not
distinguish between those who could have been
(they had committed more than one offence in
a category) and those who could not. It was important that questions be as little intrusive as possible, but the consequence was that it remained impossible to distinguish those who had committed two or more offences of a type (and hence were potential repeaters against the same target) from those who had not, and were therefore not potential repeaters. For instance, those who said they had not stolen the same car more than once are non-repeaters. However, some of them will only admit to ever stealing one car, and hence could not be a repeater in this category. The proportion of those admitting to repeats will therefore be a minimum number. Another reason for believing the level of repetition to be a minimum is that some interviewees (see below) disclosed repetitions that they had not divulged as questionnaire respondents. This would be picked up if any kind of repetition had been acknowledged in the questionnaire, but would not in cases where the questionnaire revealed none, since the interview would not have taken place.

Respondents who acknowledged repeated offences against the same target were invited to interview by one of the writers (BS), to explore the reasons for and circumstances of the repeats. Eighty-six acknowledged ‘repeaters’ against the same target were scheduled for interview. In the event, 70 interviews were successfully completed. Of these, 57 admitted repeat burglary against the same target, and 29 admitted other kinds of repetition. The reasons for not seeing the remaining 16 were that their order had been completed before they could be seen, warrants were out for their arrest, orders had been breached, and intended interviewees had been moved from Armley to other prisons.

The results will be presented in two parts. First is the extent of repetition, gleaned from the questionnaires. The second incorporates more discursive accounts of the reasons for repetition, gleaned from the interviews.

Sample prevalence of repeats

Examining the prevalence of repeats has two fundamental purposes:

1. It may demonstrate that offending against the same victim is sufficiently common for it to be routinely addressed in dealing with offenders.

2. It may demonstrate a general tendency to repeat, evident across crime types. If such a tendency exists, it may assist the police in offender targeting, offender profiling and charging practice.

Table 2 summarises the number of respondents who admitted to repeated offending of different types. Note that these are minimum estimates, given that we do not know how many respondents committed one (or no) offence of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repeat type</th>
<th>% of sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft of motor vehicle</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft from motor vehicle</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated criminal damage of same household</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated criminal damage of same business</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated violence against same person</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeats of different crime against same person/household</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeats of different crime against same business</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of force against different people but in the same place</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking or taking from different cars in the same place</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a particular kind, and hence could not have committed a repeat. Note too that repeats here do not distinguish two from more than two events, so that the Table does not approximate the number of events attributable to those who repeat.

To restate, one third of a sample of people defined as having at least one official processing for burglary admitted repeated burglary against the same target. Smaller proportions admitted repetition of other offence types against the same target, but since the sample was not defined in terms of other offence types, these smaller proportions are bound to be underestimates. Looked at another way, what proportion of the sample admitted any repetition against the same target? Table 3 presents the numbers. Excluding repetitions defined only by place, a respondent can score between 0 and 8 repetition types. A respondent scoring 0 admits no repetitions against the same target. A respondent scoring eight repetition types asserts repeat victimisation of all eight types set out in the first eight rows of Table 2. Table 3 shows that 54% of respondents admitted no repetitions, 23% one repetition type only, 8% two repetition types, with up to 2% admitting six repetition types.

Table 3. Frequency of repetition type admissions (n = 186)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of repetition types</th>
<th>% of respondents admitting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, roughly one quarter of the respondents admitting repeatedly offending against the same target in respect of at least two offence types. Put another way, a probation officer facing someone as defined by our sampling approach will know that half the time the person concerned has committed more than one offence against the same target. Half of those who have repeated crime in this way will have done so by way of two or more crime types.

What are the characteristics of people who repeat in different ways? Correlating the number of different repetition types admitted (as in Table 3) with age at first offence and number of previous convictions yields correlations which suggest that the repeaters are those most established in criminal careers. The correlation between age at first conviction and number of repetition types is significant beyond the .001 level of probability. It shows that repeaters typically came to official notice earlier than non-repeaters. The relationship between number of prior convictions and repetition is in the predicted direction, but is not statistically reliable, perhaps because of some missing data in this field.

It will be recalled from an earlier section that Steve Everson found that more frequent offenders were also more often repeaters, and the present finding is consistent with Everson’s.

The next point concerns whether any particular kind of repeat better distinguishes respondents in terms of their conviction history. Analyses of variance were conducted, with age at first conviction and number of previous convictions as the dependent variable, and repetition/non-repetition of each type separately as the independent variable. The results can be readily summarised. The separation of those who repeated from those who did not, in respect of each offence type (except repeated criminal damage of businesses), did reliably differentiate respondents according to age at first official process. The differentiation according to number of previous convictions was also consistent, but not statistically reliable. Thus for each offence type, those who repeated began their offending career significantly earlier than those who did not. Repeaters also had more prior convictions, but not to a statistically reliable extent.

The emerging impression is that the tendency to repeat crime against the same target is a
general attribute, and is expressed across crime types. This impression is strengthened by looking at 2 x 2 contingency tables separating those who repeat from those who do not within each offence type. For instance, is the tendency to repeat violence statistically independent of the tendency to repeat burglary? The answer is that it is not. Given that eight types of repetition were examined here, there were twenty-eight bivariate comparisons possible. Twenty-six of these departed significantly from statistical independence. Thus the tendency to repeat one crime type against the same victim is generally associated with the tendency to repeat another crime type against the same victim. Some offenders tend to concentrate their offending repeatedly against the same target. They tend to be those most established in a criminal career.

The conclusion of an attribute of ‘repetition compulsion’ (to borrow a phrase from psychoanalysis) is only tentative here. The inability in the present study to distinguish repeat-eligibles (those who had committed two or more of an offence type but had not committed repeats against the same target) and repeat-ineligibles (those who had committed one or no offence of a particular type) limits the strength of reachable inferences. The bias of the sample towards burglars also limits generality. Both these limitations were integral to the design of the study, and were seen as the price of limiting the scale of the study and asking questions which would be answered without undue suspicion about how the results could be used. Integration of further work in this tradition with work of the type being done by Steve Everson promises a clear and applicable account of the tendency to retrace one’s steps to crime.

The reasons for repeats

The prevalence of repeats gives no clue about why they happen. This study was deliberately set up to be exploratory, and to investigate reasons in particular. With rich qualitative data of this kind, the choice for analysis lies between, on the one hand, developing complex coding schemes and laborious classification of responses, and on the other a more user-friendly general summary of burglar accounts of why they repeat. The second approach was preferred. This is defensible only if the original data on which the conclusions are reached are made available to those who wish to test the inferences made. The original interview data are available on request to interested readers.

• Burglary

The reasons for repeats against the same target are easily summarised. Most are sub-types of the general observation by one burglar, ‘Why change a successful plan?’. Another point which became clear in a variety of different ways was the relationship between repeats and the market in stolen goods. Off-licences will predictably yield drink, schools and electrical stores will predictably yield computers, and homes will predictably yield ‘whatever you didn’t take away last time you burgled them’. In short, stealing to order or to supply a known market is more readily done by repeat offenders than one-off offences. Each of the reasons for repetition offered bears the hallmark of rationality of approach.

Each common reason for repeating burglaries will be set out with three quotations from the interviews in support.

Because the first time was easy

The house would be targeted again 'a few weeks later' when the stuff had been replaced and because the first time had been easy...

X and friends targeted this school again. They did so because of how easy it had been the first time...

X would target the same house four or five times because of how easy and successful it had been the first time.

Because the first time was profitable and goods of value remained

X had also stolen mountain bikes and tools from the garages and sheds of houses...There were sometimes two or three bikes in a garage but he
could only steal one at once. Knowing the bikes were there for the taking, X said he waited until the owners would have forgotten about it and returned to steal another bike.

Clubs ‘always have money in the Bandits’. X had information that the Bandits were well used and usually contained over £1000... The second occasion... they used the same method as before and stole around £500 from the machines.

It was a chance to get things which you had seen the first time and now had a buyer for.

**Because once the lie of the land was known, it became easy**

Once you have been into a place it is easier to burgle because you are then familiar with the layout, and you can get out much quicker.

Being familiar with the inside of a property made it easier a second time.

Keys to the door were usually hanging round, either on a shelf or the top of furniture near to the door in empty houses, so they used the keys to unlock the doors to get out and to use for the next time they broke in.

**Because new goods would be available after replacement**

The reason for targeting the house again was the quality of goods and that the insurance would have been paid out so the things would have been replaced.

X would wait about three months before burgling a house again. The same house was targeted for the quality of goods, the easy access, and the hope that the goods had been replaced.

X targeted this factory again six months later, when he knew the tools would have been replaced.

**Because of a grudge against the victim (primarily schools)**

X burgled his father’s business three nights in a row. X had left home because he could not put up with the rules his father set... X also burgled his parents’ home. He bore a grudge against his parents... X said he had burgled his parents’ home four times.

X had targeted the schools they had attended because they knew their way around the school and also the classrooms which housed the computers. They enjoyed doing these schools as they hated school and had a grudge against some of the teachers.

X targeted the small engineering firm where he used to work. He did this to get his own back on his former employer who had dismissed him from the firm.

Grudge attacks were particularly often manifest in criminal damage of homes and schools.

The reasons for stopping repetition are simply summarised as change or the presumption of change:

**Change**

If a complex alarm had been installed or other security such as bars had been placed at the windows or doors, then (we) left it alone.

X would return two or three times to the same factory or until they noticed security had been installed, or if they received inside information... that security patrols, dogs or silent alarms were being installed.

X planned to target this house again but the reason they didn’t was because the occupants had installed security lighting around the house and the side door had been replaced with another.

**Presumption/suspicion of change**

X said that they never went back more than twice to the same house for fear of being ‘trapped’ next time.

X said he did not return to this school because he thought he had been lucky. Also he wondered if a silent alarm had been installed since the alarm had not activated this time. Greed gets caught... don’t go back if you sense something different.

X said he would only go back to the same house twice... X said that if a house is persistently burgled then the police put cameras in the house. A pressure pad activates a camera in the house, and then they have got you.
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- Vehicle crime

Reasons for repeated vehicle crime involving the same vehicle concentrated on ease, desirability of the vehicle, greater value of replacement accessories, grudge and fun. Grudge offences tended to involve criminal damage rather than theft. A few examples will suffice.

X frequented golf course car parks. He waited until the owners had finished a game and watched them put the clubs into the boot of the car. When the owners left the car X said he broke into the boot with a screwdriver and stole the clubs. X said he targeted the same cars again a few weeks later. He waited until he thought the clubs would have been replaced and the car theft forgotten.

X had stolen the stereo from the same car more than once. He would return to the same street and if he spotted the same car parked on the street he would take the stereo again if it had been replaced. ... You get more money for brand new things.

X bought a car from a family he knew. X found out later that the car had been used by a friend of the family to kill himself... When X found out he was livid. He went back and hit the male member of the family. On his way from the house he scraped the side of their car parked in the drive with a stone. ... X went back to the family who had sold him the car one night and smashed the car again with a brick, causing considerable damage to the car.

X stole his Grandma’s car on three occasions... on each occasion he used the car to run his girlfriend home late at night. On the first occasion his Grandma reported him to the police. He stole the car again for convenience and to take his girlfriend home. The third occasion was for his convenience also. It was easy to steal. This time he was chased by the police and crushed it into the wall. ... He bore no grudge (sic).

X had been sold by a buyer that any key for one of the new Ford cars would also fit one in five of any other car of that make. X and friend were given a key and they walked around a long-stay car park trying the key. They eventually found a car that the key fitted. They deactivated the alarm by opening the bonnet and ripping out the wires, then drove off. On their way to deliver the car to the buyer, they were stopped by the police and arrested. About a month later the same car was parked in the same car park. X and friend stole the same car again and successfully delivered it to the buyer.

X said he had stolen one particular Cosworth more than once from the drive of a house, and another which was always parked on the same street... The buzz was the reason for taking the car and having the experience of ‘what some folk have every day’. Usually it appeared on the drive again after a while so they would take it again. It was easy.

X had stolen the same car 15 times from the same driveway. He did it for fun and to see how many times he could get away with it. He was caught and charged but he did it again. It was not a fast car. He just did it for a buzz.

X said they would return two or three times some days to the same car park and had taken stereos out of the same cars when they had been replaced. New ones get more cash.

- Violence

Repeated violence, as would be inferred from the analysis of the British Crime Survey detailed earlier, surrounded troubled relationships.

X had assaulted a person who had previously gone out with X’s girlfriend... He had punched this person in a pub and later in the town centre where he ‘gave him a beating’.

X had used violence on the same person because he owed him money for drugs... X said he punched this person whenever he saw him.

X had used violence against a former friend.... This friend had got ‘strapped’ and tried to show X up in front of other people. ‘It was the way he talked to me’. On two occasions he beat the person up and once he threatened him with a sword to scare him.

The violence occurred when X’s ex-girlfriend got her father and brothers to threaten X when X had broken down the door of his ex-girlfriend’s house. X said they came round and he hit them with a cricket bat. Other times he ended up fighting one of her brothers whenever
they met. He said he had punched his ex-
girlfriend’s father when the father had threatened
him after trying to get access to see his son.

X said he used violence against another lad he
knew because he owed him money. He beat him
up in the street and in his home until he got his
money back.

Repeats in this category are a depressing litany
of fights over drug debts, fights with the family
of ex-partners, and fights because friends or
partners have become ‘stroppy’ or ‘mouthy’.
Chronic offending in these circumstances, as
noted at the beginning of this report, is now
well recognised.

The nature of repetition

As noted, many of the advantages of repetition
concern ease of action and predictability of
outcome. There are some circumstances in
which a second or subsequent action may be
taken against a person who or object which is
functionally equivalent to the first. We would
like to refer to this as isomorphic repetition.
Thoughts along these lines began when the
research preparatory to the Huddersfield
‘Biting Back’ project showed that, after a
burglary, houses two doors away were more
likely to be victimised than houses next door.
It was conjectured that this was because semi-
detached houses two doors away were more
similar than the next door (mirror-image)
house. Similar thoughts occurred here. One
respondent noted:

Having done one Petrol Station, then burglars
are familiar with the layout of the other stations
in that chain. This makes it easy to move around
when the burglar has knowledge of where the
stock and safe is kept.

In a somewhat different way, all Ford Mondeos
have similar layouts. In a still different way,
all brothers of an ex-partner with whom one is
disenchanted share the essential attributes
which may make for violent victimisation. To
simplify, different places or people may be
functionally equivalent, so that victimisation
of them may be no more problematic than
victimisation of precisely the same person or
object. This kind of repetition demands
theoretical development. Tracing the patterns
of functional equivalence and similarity is
beyond the scope of this paper, but seems like
one of the next steps in clarifying the issue.
We should perhaps distinguish between repeat
victimisation, isomorphic victimisation, and
independent victimisation. Establishing the
lines on which isomorphism runs is as
important as it seems daunting.

Conclusions

What does the research contribute to our
awareness of repeat victimisation and its crime
control implications?

- It confirms that repetition of crime against
  the same victim or target is a practice
  common amongst those offenders who
  included at least one burglary in their
  records.

- It suggests that repetition against the same
  target is a characteristic of those most
  confirmed in a criminal career.

- It reveals that repetition tends to be a
  characteristic which crosses crime types, so
  that those repeating one crime type against
  the same target will also tend to repeat other
  crime types against the same target.

- It establishes that the reasons for repeating
  acquisitive crime against the same target are
  quite rational. Factors like the predictability
  of the market for goods make repeats
  rational.

- It shows that change or supposed change in
  the target is the primary factor which
  prevents repetition.

- It suggests a principle of isomorphism
  which extends the notion of what constitutes
  a repetition.

- It concludes that the awareness of repeated
  victimisation of the same or similar targets
  is essential for offence-focused probation
  work.
It speculates on the existence of functionally equivalent (isomorphic) offences, as well as direct repeats. For instance, one interviewee noted that the layout of all petrol stations in a chain had safes and stock similarly located, so to have burgled one makes the subsequent burglary of any much easier.

Notes

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