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# The Link Between Recurrent Maltreatment and Offending Behaviour

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**Abstract:** *This article considers recurrent maltreatment and offending behaviour. The sample was 60 males and 19 females (11 to 18 years) resident within a secure institution in England and considered a risk to themselves and/or others. Overall, 20.8% had not experienced maltreatment, 6.5% had experienced a single incident, 11.7% were repeat victims (same perpetrator), 6.5% were revictimised (different perpetrators), and more than half (54.5%) had suffered both repeat and revictimisation. Of those who had committed a violent and/or sexual crime, 74% had experienced some form of revictimisation, compared to 33% of those who committed nonviolent offences. Those young people most likely to have committed violent and/or sexual crimes were those who had been victims of recurrent extrafamilial maltreatment (many of whom had also experienced recurrent intrafamilial maltreatment). Thus, in this sample, revictimisation was associated with serious crimes. However, these findings are preliminary, and prospective research with a larger sample is needed.*

## VICTIM TO OFFENDER

The idea that victims of maltreatment may subsequently adopt offending behaviour is not new (see Falshaw, Browne, & Hollin, 1996 for a review of the literature). Previous research debating its existence has concentrated on the rates of abuse and neglect in the histories of offender populations. For example, Scudder, Blount, Heide, and Silverman (1993) found that an abuse referral was significantly more likely for their delinquent sample as opposed to their nondelinquent group and that an offending referral was more likely to have been made for the delinquents with a history of maltreatment than the nonabused. Although this method of retrospective data collection has been criticised for its inaccuracies (Yarrow, Campbell, & Burton, 1970), it still reveals a pattern of abuse and/or neglect that may act as a precursor to offending behaviour. In fact, it is this pattern that has been investigated in further detail to attempt to elicit which specific factors relating to the maltreatment episodes are more likely to be associated with involvement in criminal activity.

Some authors provide evidence to suggest that it is merely the “experiencing” of the abuse and/or neglect that is linked to the adoption of offending behaviour as

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a teenager (Benoit & Kennedy, 1992; Stein & Lewis, 1992; Widom & Ames, 1994). However, other studies have proposed that experiencing a particular type of maltreatment will be most likely to result in the exhibition of the same kind of offending behaviour. For example, Dutton and Hart (1992) suggested that those with a history of physical abuse will be more likely to progress to violent offending in comparison to other types of criminal activity. Likewise, several studies have provided some evidence that those individuals who have experienced sexual abuse are more likely to become sexually violent (Bagley, Wood, & Young, 1994; Dutton & Hart, 1992; Ford & Linney, 1995; Prendergast, 1991). Indeed, Rasmussen, Burton, and Christopherson (1992) go further by stating that a young person is actually unlikely to become a sexual abuser unless they have previously been exposed to some sort of sexual trauma. Furthermore, Watkins and Bentovim (1992) explain that young male victims of sexual abuse attempt to exert control over their victimisation experiences by going on to sexually abuse others (i.e., reenactment).

However, not all victim to offender studies have supported this view. Earlier research has suggested that neglect cases are more likely to progress to property offences (Jenkins, 1968), with sexual abuse victims being more likely to become nonaggressive offenders and physically abused individuals more likely committing aggressive offences (Mouzakitis, 1981). Smith, Berkman, and Fraser (1980) also claimed that those experiencing physical abuse and neglect are more likely to commit violent offences, whereas Reidy (1977) has previously shown that suffering physical abuse is more likely to predict violent offenders in comparison to neglect.

Moving away from the idea that certain maltreatment experiences will lead to the exhibition of a particular type of offence, Zingraff, Leiter, Johnsen, and Myers (1994) argued that the propensity to crime in general differs depending on the type of maltreatment experienced. They revealed that it is the victims of neglect who are at the greatest risk of delinquency, with a probability of 1 in 10 becoming involved in criminal activity. Victims of physical abuse were shown to have a 9.3% (1 in 11) probability of entering delinquency, whereas the sexual abuse victims were found to be no more at risk of offending than the control group.

Although this research has gone some way to exposing the method by which maltreatment episodes affect the adoption of delinquency, the sequence of events may not be as simple as first suggested. Unfortunately, in a substantial proportion of cases, various forms of maltreatment occur in unison. Boswell (1995) uncovered a combination of two or more abuse types as having occurred within 27% of 200 juveniles sentenced, under Section 53,<sup>1</sup> for serious crimes of a sexual and/or violent nature. This makes the effects of specific types of abuse very difficult to isolate within those who have been victim to more than one form of maltreatment simultaneously. Ney, Fung, and Wickett (1994), whilst researching the occurrence of sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and verbal abuse in a sample of Canadian adolescents, discovered that less than 5% of these maltreatments occurred in isolation. Although not in relation to the adoption of delin-

quency, these authors attempted to highlight the most deleterious combination of abuse and/or neglect on these young people, such as on their enjoyment of living and hopes for the future. They revealed that experiencing an amalgamation of physical abuse, neglect, and verbal abuse resulted in the most negative consequences.

No matter how maltreatment experiences are implicated in the progression to criminal activity, the fact that the majority of abuse and/or neglect victims do not become delinquent (Koski, 1987; Scudder et al., 1993; Widom, 1991) cannot be ignored. Widom (1989) discovered that only one in six physically abused young people goes on to commit a violent offence. In addition, Watkins and Bentovim (1992) suggested in their review of the literature that only one in five sexually abused males later commits sex crimes. So what are the deciding factors, for those who experience abuse and/or neglect, which govern whether one young person will subsequently adopt offending behaviour whereas another four will not?

Skuse and colleagues (1998) studied the life pathways of 25 sexually victimised adolescent boys. They reported that all of the 11 boys who sexually offended against other children had grown up in a climate of family violence. For the 14 boys who were victims, only 6 had experienced a climate of family violence and 8 had not, which indicated a small but significant difference.

Although some attempt has been made to look at the maltreatment process in more detail, research has not really moved beyond analysing the type of abuse and/or neglect that has taken place and in what way this will affect the later involvement in criminal activity. For example, previous studies have claimed that males have a greater tendency to externalise reactions to their abuse, whereas females more often internalise them (Dembo, Williams, Wothke, Schneider, & Brown, 1992; Fantuzzo & Lindquist, 1989; Friedrich, 1988; Summit, 1983). It is important to go beyond this stage of analysis to elicit a greater understanding of the victim to offender pathway. Two areas that have not been given attention are the consequences of the abuse in terms of perpetrators and repetition of the abuse, in particular, the fact that the perpetrator may vary during different abuse episodes. However, before this effect can be considered in terms of offending behaviour, we must gain an insight into the literature relating to repeat victimisation.

## RECURRENT MALTREATMENT AND VICTIMISATION

There is an increasingly large body of work demonstrating that victims of sexual abuse in childhood have a higher rate of sexual victimisation in adulthood than women without a history of child sexual abuse (e.g., Banyard, Arnold, & Smith, 2000; Gidycz, Coble, Latham, & Layman, 1993; Himelein, 1995; Koss & Dinero, 1989; Mandoki & Burkhart, 1989; Mayall & Gold, 1995; Russell, 1986). Furthermore, this trend is not just seen in terms of sexual victimisation. Moeller, Bachmann, and Moeller (1993) reported that the combination of maltreatment types appeared to be the important variable in prediction of later risk, so that the greater the number of abuse types experienced the greater the risk. For example,

1% of women in their sample without a childhood history of maltreatment reported being the victim of adult sexual abuse compared to 5.6% of those who had experienced one type of maltreatment, 21.9% with two types, and 33.3% with three types. Similarly, 5.3% of the women with no history of abuse reported being the victim of adult physical abuse compared to 9.4% of those who had experienced one type, 28.9% with two, and 32.4% with three.

Another important factor to consider is that the increased vulnerability identified in adulthood is also likely to exist within childhood and adolescence (Finkelhor, 1995). Indeed, recent empirical research has proven this to be the case (Krahe, Scheinberger-Olwig, Waizenhofer, & Kolpin, 1999; Liem & Boudewyn, 1999).

Hence, a number of researchers have asked questions about the number of children who experience maltreatment on more than one occasion (for a review of the literature, see DePanfilis & Zuravin, 1998; Hamilton & Browne, 1998). In brief, data from the United Kingdom National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) showed that 5% of children on the Child Protection Register between 1988 and 1990 were known to have been reabused by December 1991 (Creighton, 1992) compared to 9.3% of children on the Colorado Abuse and Neglect Registry between 1986 and 1989 (Fryer & Miyoshi, 1994).

However, a study analysing 400 children referred to Child Protection Units in an English police service found that 24% ( $n = 96$ ) were the subject of at least one rereferral in a 27-month period (Hamilton & Browne, 1999). Furthermore, once a child had been referred on at least two occasions, his or her risk of another rereferral, within 27 months, more than doubled. For the first time, this study looked in detail at the patterns of maltreatment. The majority of recurrent referrals had a perpetrator(s) who were always intrafamilial (72.5%). However, in a small number of recurrent referrals, the perpetrator(s) were always extrafamilial (2%). In 25.5% of cases, the recurrent referrals involved maltreatment both inside and outside the family. Overall, 43.1% of the referred cases concerned a child who had been victimised by more than one perpetrator, with the remaining 56.9% suffering repeated victimisation by the same perpetrator (Hamilton & Browne, 1999).

Looking at families as a whole, rates of reported rereferral for a family to a Child Protection Agency within the United Kingdom range from 20% to 63% (Lynch & Roberts, 1982; Baldwin & Oliver, 1975, respectively). It should be noted that these refer to either the index child or a sibling being the subject of the investigation.

Even during intensive treatment programmes within the United States, approximately one third of the parents maltreated their children at least once more, whereas more than 50% of the families were considered likely to mistreat their children again following the end of the work (Cohn & Daro, 1987). These data are based on 3,253 families in 89 different treatment programmes using a variety of interventions, and therefore it could be said that the picture is quite bleak. Yet, the work demonstrated greater success with families referred for sexual abuse compared to those referred for neglect. So it is necessary to look beyond merely

abused versus nonabused and consider differences between abusive experiences and the effect this has on long-term outcome—not merely in terms of the form of maltreatment, but also in relation to more specific details.

Studies looking at outcome of maltreatment (e.g., delinquency or psychological problems) have generally considered the type of act (Gold, Hughes, & Swingle, 1996), perpetrator relationship and frequency of abuse (Friedrich, Urquiza, & Beilke, 1986), and severity of abuse (Wyatt & Newcomb, 1986). However, there is a general failure to ask the question, Was the child abused by more than one person and what effect does this have? An exception to this observation was a study by Stein and Lewis (1992), who found that four out of five incarcerated delinquent boys had been physically abused and that more than half (54%) had been victimised by multiple abusers. Even those authors who have mentioned the number of victims within their sample who were maltreated by more than one perpetrator (e.g., Alexander, 1993; Finkelhor, 1980) leave it unclear as to whether this was at the same time or different times and what the cumulative effect of subsequent perpetrators was.

Researchers need to consider the difference in consequences between same perpetrator repetition and different perpetrator repetition. Clearly, professionals would expect different responses from the extremes of, for example, (a) a child who suffered a single episode of abuse by a stranger or acquaintance and who lives in a loving, supportive family as compared to (b) a child who has been systematically abused by their parent or caregiver. Furthermore, evidence suggests that intrafamilial sexual abuse may increase the risk of extrafamilial child sexual abuse (Gold et al., 1996). Therefore, there is clear validity in distinguishing between the various forms of repeated abuse and fully investigating the differences between their occurrence and long-term effects on the victim. For this reason, Hamilton and Browne (1998) proposed a new glossary of terms to make the distinction between different patterns of single and recurrent episodes of abuse and to provide a framework for future research (see Table 1).

It has been suggested that the risk factors for subsequent victimisation may include low self-esteem (Gold, 1986) and feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness (Gidycz et al., 1993; Lundberg-Love & Geffner, 1989; Russell, 1986). In addition, ensuing incidents of maltreatment are likely to exacerbate the possible effects of the first victimisation (Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor, 1995; Browne & Hamilton, 1997). Indeed, it may be these factors that encourage young people during adolescence to adopt delinquent behaviour. Specifically, it has been suggested that the association with delinquent peers possibly provides protection from further victimisation or compensation for an abusive family environment (Fagan, Piper, & Cheng, 1987). Thus, it would be expected that those who had experienced repeated abuse by the same perpetrator or revictimisation by different perpetrators at different points in their life would be more likely to follow this path than young persons who experience a single incident of maltreatment.

In summary, as the victim-to-offender literature shows, delinquency is one of the potential long-term effects of childhood victimisation generally (Howing,

**TABLE 1**  
GLOSSARY OF TERMS FOR PATTERNS OF SINGLE  
AND RECURRENT EPISODES OF MALTREATMENT

Single victimisation	One incident of maltreatment, one perpetrator
Multiple victimisation	One incident of maltreatment, more than one perpetrator
Repeat victimisation	More than one incident with same perpetrator or perpetrators at time one and time two
Revictimisation	More than one incident with different perpetrators at time one and time two

NOTE: Adapted from Hamilton and Browne, 1998.

Wodarski, Kurtz, Gaudin, & Herbst, 1990; Kruttschnitt & Dornfield, 1993; Kruttschnitt, Ward, & Scheble, 1987; Widom, 1989, 1991). Furthermore, Rivera and Widom (1990) and Dutton and Hart (1992) found that a history of maltreatment increases the potential for violent crime specifically. However, because not all children who are maltreated demonstrate violent behaviour, it is important to distinguish between those who do and those who do not. Therefore, due to the absence of literature relating repeat and revictimisation to delinquent behaviour, an exploratory study was designed to investigate this association. The rationale for the hypotheses was as follows.

By definition, repeat victimisation involves only one perpetrator. Most often, maltreated children experience abuse early in their childhood at the hands of a family member (Browne & Herbert, 1997). With intrafamilial revictimisation, there must have been more than one person within that family who was maltreating that young person. As a result, this would reduce the number of people within the family who may be seen as a protective figure in a supportive role. Prior research has demonstrated that the presence of a significant other and a caring, understanding family environment during childhood acts as a protective factor against long-term adverse consequences (Alexander & Lupfer, 1987; Egeland, Jacobvitz, & Sroufe, 1988; Fromuth, 1986; Hunter & Kilstrom, 1979). In addition, revictimisation leads to much poorer long-term adjustment, an increase in fearfulness, and perhaps a greater belief in the victim that they are uniquely vulnerable to attack (Murphy et al., 1988).

Therefore, extending the rationale, being victimised by more than one perpetrator and by people outside the family may lead to a generalised belief that they are vulnerable to abuse by anyone who chooses to maltreat them. It is possible that this means they are more likely to seek protection from delinquent peers as suggested by Fagan et al. (1987). Thus, abuse by different people at different points in the young person's life may be increasing the likelihood that the victim-to-offender cycle will occur (Freeman-Longo, 1986).

Thus, it is hypothesised that experiencing revictimisation is likely to be more damaging than repeat victimisation (either inside or outside the family). However,



repeat and revictimisation both inside and outside the family may be even more harmful than just within the family, leading to extreme consequences in more cases (i.e., violent and/or sexual offending).

Hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* Those young people who have experienced some form of revictimisation are more likely to have committed a violent and/or sexual offence than those young people who have experienced repeat victimisation or no abuse.

*Hypothesis 2:* Those young people who have experienced repeat and revictimisation both inside and outside the family are most likely of all to have committed violent and/or sexual crimes.

## METHOD

### SAMPLE

Information was collected on 79 young people (60 males, 19 females) who were resident within a secure centre for young people between December 1994 and May 1996. The centre provides a secure environment for up to 40 emotionally and behaviourally disturbed young males and females. Young people are only admitted if they are between the ages of 11 and 18 years and are considered to be a risk to themselves and/or others. Individuals who have proven uncontrollable within existing care provision are referred to the centre by local authorities under Section 25 of the Children Act 1989. Home Office referrals of convicted young offenders subject to Section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 consist of two groups: those young offenders who have been found guilty of murder before their 18th birthday and are detained indeterminate (Section 53 [1]) and those convicted of a grave offence such as attempted murder, rape, or arson, below the age of 17 years, who are subject to a specified period of incarceration (Section 53 [2]).

### PROCEDURE

Information was obtained from the admission file of each young person resident within the centre during the period December 1994 to May 1996. Background details recorded on admission included offence history, childhood referrals, self-harming behaviours, maltreatment history, medical problems, educational achievements, and family environment (see Falshaw & Browne, 1997 for a detailed description of the data collection instrument).

To gain a more in-depth picture of the abusive/neglectful incidents experienced by the young people, additional sources were consulted. Where possible, further information was sought from the staff assigned to work on a one-to-one basis with the young person (keyworker) and also social workers who had been involved in

the past. The information sought related to type of maltreatment(s) subjected to, frequency of abuse, number of perpetrators, and relationship of perpetrator(s) to the young person.

Definitions of abuse were taken from “Working Together under the Children Act, 1989” (Home Office, Department of Health, Departments of Education and Science, and Welsh Office, 1991) (see appendix) and the assumption was made that child care professionals would also have based their classification on these guidelines. The reasoning for this was that one of the main purposes of the “Working Together” definitions was to standardise categorisation among social workers, the police, and other agencies dealing with child protection issues.

In terms of distinctions between intrafamilial and extrafamilial abuse, the former was taken as biological or stepparents, cohabitants, and extended family members. The latter included adoptive or foster parents, lodgers, care workers, acquaintances, and strangers.

*Treatment of data.* The original sample was broken down to demonstrate the pattern of victimisation suffered by the population of offenders only. Three females had not committed any offences and were excluded from this analysis. For clarification and simplicity, the offence types were combined into sexual and/or violent crime and nonviolent crime only.

## RESULTS

Child Protection information was available for 77 young people (58 males, 19 females) and was only absent in two cases, both of whom were male. Of this sample, 34% had previously been placed on the Child Protection Register in England and Wales.

### HISTORY OF VICTIMISATION EXPERIENCES

Of this sample ( $N = 77$ ), 20.8% (15 males, 1 female) had experienced no maltreatment, 5.2% (2 males, 2 females) had experienced a single incident (single victimisation), and 1.3% (1 female) a single incident of abuse by multiple perpetrators (multiple victimisation). In terms of recurrent maltreatment, 11.7% (5 males, 4 females) of the sample were repeat victims of abuse (i.e., incidents of abuse by the same person), 6.5% (5 males) were revictimised (i.e., incidents of abuse by different perpetrators), and more than half (54.5%) of the young people (31 males, 11 females) had suffered both repeat and revictimisation during their childhood. Table 2 displays the gender breakdown by type of victimisation experienced. However, there was no significant gender difference in the overall number who experienced repeat and/or revictimisation in comparison to those who had suffered single victimisation, multiple victimisation, or no victimisation at all.

**TABLE 2**  
HISTORY OF VICTIMISATION EXPERIENCES ( $N = 77$ )<sup>a</sup>

<i>Victimisation Type</i>	<i>% Male</i> ( <i>n = 58</i> )	<i>% Female</i> ( <i>n = 19</i> )	<i>% Total</i> ( <i>n = 77</i> )
No victimisation	25.9	5.3	20.8
Single victimisation	3.4	10.5	5.2
Multiple victimisation	0.0	5.3	1.3
Repeat victimisation only	8.6	21.1	11.7
Revictimisation only	8.6	0.0	6.5
Both repeat and revictimisation	53.4	57.9	54.5

a. There was no significant gender difference in the overall number who had experienced repeat and/or revictimisation in comparison to those who had suffered single victimisation, multiple victimisation, or no victimisation at all.

In 49% of cases, the young person was offended against by family members only, 13% by nonfamily members only, and 38% by both family and nonfamily members. The total number of perpetrators for each young person was ascertained for the 66 cases in which information was available (53 males and 13 females). This ranged from between 1 and 5, with a mean, median, and mode of 2. Figure 1 shows that in total, three quarters of the sample had experienced maltreatment by two or more perpetrators. There were no significant gender differences.

The number of types of maltreatment that each young person may have experienced was calculated based on any type of maltreatment occurring within the family (i.e., sexual, physical, neglect, emotional) in addition to physical and sexual abuse perpetrated outside the family. Therefore, the maximum score was 6. Of the 61 cases in which full information was available, 26.2% suffered one type of maltreatment, 34.4% experienced two types, 21.3% three types, 14.8% four types, and 3.2% experienced either five or six types of maltreatment. Gender differences are shown in Table 3; however, there was no significant gender difference between those who had experienced only one type of abuse in comparison to those who had experienced two or more.

#### TYPES OF OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR

It should be noted when considering the following percentages that many young people have been involved in more than one type of crime. Table 4 shows that fewer than a quarter (22.1%) of the 77 young persons in this sample had committed a sex offence, all of whom were male, whereas more than three quarters (77.9%) had committed a violent offence. Interestingly, 13 of these were females. In terms of nonviolent crimes, three quarters (75.3%) had carried out a theft, 62.3% a burglary, 44.2% a robbery, 55.8% an auto crime, 79.2% criminal damage, and 49.4% other offences (e.g., drugs, weapons, etc.). The gender breakdown for

**TABLE 3**  
 NUMBER OF MALTREATMENT TYPES  
 SUFFERED DURING CHILDHOOD (*N* = 61)<sup>a</sup>

<i>Number of Victimisations</i>	<i>% Male</i> ( <i>n</i> = 43)	<i>% Female</i> ( <i>n</i> = 18)	<i>% Total</i> ( <i>n</i> = 61)
One type	27.9	22.2	26.2
Two types	37.2	27.8	34.4
Three types	16.3	33.3	21.3
Four types	18.6	5.6	14.8
Five or six types	0.0	11.1	3.3

a. There was no significant gender difference between those who had experienced only one type of abuse in comparison to those who had experienced two or more.

these offences is presented in Table 4. Significantly more males were found to have committed sexual offences (e.g., indecent assault, rape), burglary, and car crime in comparison to females. For other offence types, there were no significant gender differences.

Of the sample, 49% had committed 17 or fewer known offences, whereas 51% had committed 18 or more. In relation to convictions, however, 49% had 4 or less and 51% had 5 or more. Age at first offence was 12 years or younger for 59% of the sample.

#### PATTERNS OF RECURRENT MALTREATMENT AND OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR

Information on the patterns of recurrent maltreatment was available on 74 (58 male and 16 female) young offenders (see Table 5). Looking at the number of young offenders within each victimisation category, those who had been maltreated outside the family only were comparatively few in number (*n* = 8). However, all 8 of these young persons (100%) had committed some sort of violent and/or sexual offence. All but 1 of the intra- and extrafamilial repeat and revictimisation group (95%) had also committed violent and/or sexual offences. This compares to 69% of the no abuse group, 63% of the repeat victimisation group, and 85% of the intrafamilial repeat and revictimisation group. However, the significance of this observation could not be tested due to the small sample sizes within each specific category, and the categories were combined (together with the genders) for statistical analysis.

Overall, nearly three quarters (74%) of all those young people who had committed violent and/or sexual crimes had experienced some form of revictimisation

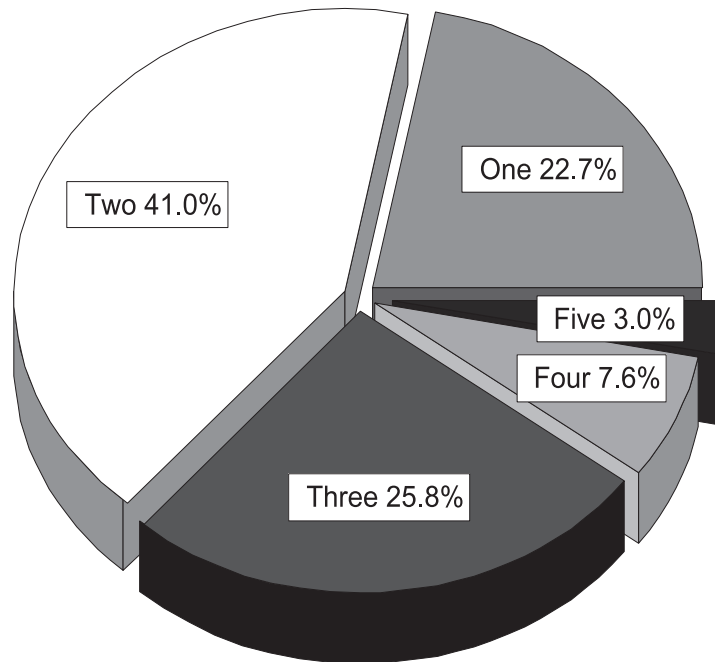


Figure 1 Number of Perpetrators of Abuse for Each Young Person (N = 66)

TABLE 4  
TYPES OF OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR (N = 77)

Offence Type	% Males (n = 58)	% Females (n = 19)	% Total (n = 77)
Violent offence	81.0	68.4	77.9
Sex offence*	29.3	0.0	22.1
Criminal damage	82.8	68.4	79.2
Theft	77.6	68.4	75.3
Burglary*	70.7	36.8	62.3
Car crime*	67.2	21.1	55.8
Robbery	44.8	42.1	44.2
Other offences (e.g., drugs, weapons, and so forth)	53.4	36.8	49.4

\* = Significant at  $p < 0.01$  (chi-square test,  $df = 1$ ).

by more than one perpetrator. By contrast, only a third (33%) of those who committed a nonviolent offence only had experienced revictimisation (chi-square = 5.7,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). A chi-square test was applied to assess the significance of these data.

#### CASE STUDY

Finally, to place this statistical information in a practice-based context, a brief case study will be given as an example of patterns of maltreatment both of repeat and revictimisation. A fuller analysis of this case study may be found in Falshaw and Browne (1999).

J was removed from his mother's care at about the age of 2 years as a result of physical abuse and neglect by her (intrafamilial repeat victimisation). All efforts at rehabilitation failed. J was placed in foster care (the youngest of seven foster children) and adopted by the same family. He later made allegations of physical and sexual abuse against his adoptive parents (possible revictimisation). During this time in early childhood, he was a poor sleeper and both restless and aggressive during the day. His relationship with his adoptive parents was recorded as "strained and fairly distant." His adoptive mother was said to be ambivalent toward him and his adoptive father strict and rigid. He spent a period in respite care.

During middle childhood, he became increasingly hostile and ambivalent toward his adoptive parents and began to shoplift and abscond from the family home. His adoptive mother blamed J for her miscarriage as a result of a violent argument and refused to have him return home. At this point, J felt abandoned both by his biological mother and adoptive parents (revictimisation in terms of psychological abuse and neglect). He had low self-esteem and was very isolated.

J absconded on several occasions from his second foster placement and displayed disruptive behaviour. He was then placed in two successive residential children's homes and a residential special school. His behaviour was becoming increasingly out of control and he began to set fires. As he entered early adolescence, he began to associate with a gang of older males who were physically assaulting him. There were also concerns surrounding sexual assault by these males. Overall, it is therefore possible that J experienced both extrafamilial repeat and revictimisation at this time. J was involved in consuming alcohol, drugs, and solvents with the group, as well as torturing animals. He increasingly engaged in criminal activity (e.g., theft, robbery, and violent assault) and it was felt that he did so to enhance his standing with the group.

As a teenager, J was admitted to this secure unit following a conviction for aggravated burglary in which he and a younger accomplice subjected an elderly woman to a serious physical assault. He was younger than 16 years at the time of

**TABLE 5**  
 PATTERNS OF RECURRENT MALTREATMENT  
 AND OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR (*N* = 74)

<i>Type of Maltreatment</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>% Violent and/or Sexual Offence (n = 62)</i>	<i>% Nonviolent Offences Only (n = 12)</i>
No maltreatment	16	69	31
Intrafamilial repeat victimisation only	8	63	37
Intrafamilial repeat and/or revictimisation	20	85	15
Intrafamilial and extrafamilial repeat and revictimisation	22	95	5
Extrafamilial only (repeat and/or revictimisation)	8	100	0

this offence. His sentence was reduced to 5 years on appeal. Therefore, J has suffered maltreatment from birth. This has encompassed both repeat and revictimisation by family members (intrafamilial) and nonfamily members (extrafamilial) by the time he was in his early teenage years. This occurred alongside a progressive development of violent behaviour. Hence, it is safe to assume that, in this case, the intrafamilial abuse and neglect preceded his childhood aggression.

In terms of the development of J's criminal behaviour, a number of influencing factors were identified. These were multiple family and residential placements and their breakdown, educational failure, a delinquent peer group, and substance misuse. All these factors place an individual at greater risk of revictimisation by different people, which perpetuates the cycle of victim to offender.

## DISCUSSION

From the above findings, the first hypothesis was upheld. It was found that young people who had experienced some form of revictimisation were more likely to have committed a violent and/or sexual offence than those young people who had experienced intrafamilial repeat victimisation or no abuse during their childhood. With regard to Hypothesis 2, it appears that those young people who had suffered extrafamilial repeat and/or revictimisation (*n* = 8) or both repeat and revictimisation inside and outside the family (*n* = 22) were the most likely of all to

have committed violent and/or sexual crimes. Only 3% of these 30 individuals offended nonviolently.

The findings from this study suggest that it is those who have suffered revictimisation by different perpetrators who are more likely to show violent and/or sexually offending behaviour. The authors postulate that this may be because each subsequent perpetrator exacerbates the effects from the previous incident of maltreatment. This has also been suggested by Finkelhor (1995) in his essay on developmental victimology.

It is also interesting to note that many young persons who had experienced either intrafamilial repeat victimisation or had no history of maltreatment were showing similar patterns of offending behaviour. However, this is a specialised sample of severely emotionally and behaviourally disturbed adolescents who have committed an inflated number of severe and/or repetitive crimes. This explains why a large percentage of the no abuse sample have committed various offences independent of a maltreatment history. In addition to this, similar to the families of the abused cases, there is a higher rate of family difficulties in the no abuse group than would be found in a normal population. Many of the risk factors for abuse have been shown to also be risk factors for later delinquent/criminal behaviour (Briere, 1988; Widom & Ames, 1994), so these factors may lead either to maltreatment, directly to offending behaviour, or to offending via maltreatment.

It has previously been suggested that males are more likely to externalise the consequences of maltreatment in comparison to females who more frequently internalise (Dembo et al., 1992; Fantuzzo & Lindquist, 1989; Summit, 1983). Indeed, in this study, all 3 young people who were recorded as not committing any crimes were female and had been maltreated. However, 13 females (68.4%) had committed violent offences.

The 8 young persons (5 males and 3 females) who were only abused by extrafamilial acquaintances or strangers all went on to commit violent and/or sexual offences. Research has shown that young people who engage in high-risk behaviours are more likely to become victims of crime themselves (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1991; Jensen & Brownfield, 1986; Lauritsen, Sampson, & Laub, 1991). Therefore, it may be that because of the prolonged exposure to delinquent peers, their risk of being offended against rises. So, the extrafamilial abuse pattern mentioned above might be a consequence of their offending behaviour as opposed to a precursor. In the case study above, however, this was not the case. This highlights the complexity of the pathways and emphasises the importance of considering intrafamilial and extrafamilial abuse separately as quite different processes may be involved.

Previous research has shown that some of the consequences of maltreatment are lowered self-esteem, feelings of powerlessness, vulnerability, and lack of trust in others (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Gidycz et al., 1993; Gold, 1986; Lundberg-Love & Geffner, 1989; Russell, 1986). It may therefore be assumed that because these effects might result from abuse by one perpetrator, they are likely to be



heightened by subsequent perpetrators (Liem & Boudewyn, 1999). Therefore, rather than looking at each incident in isolation, the cumulative effect must be taken into account.

This study indicates that a trend between revictimisation by different perpetrators and more severe forms of criminal activity may exist. However, the findings of this study emerged in a specialised sample of emotionally disturbed young people, in which their life histories had been retrospectively considered. The limits of this simplistic approach need to be supplemented by prospective research with a large population of maltreated and nonmaltreated children. A larger sample is required to both replicate these findings and conduct a more detailed analysis of adverse developmental pathways and how they impact on antisocial and criminal behaviour. Possible areas for further consideration include: the influence of age and developmental stage; the number of perpetrators involved over time; the number and types of abuse experienced; the severity and duration of the abuse; the relationship between victim and perpetrator; degree of injury and force used to overcome the victim; and the consequences of disclosure.

## INTERVENTION

Working with young offenders who have a history of childhood victimisation, it is important to help them take responsibility for their offending behaviour before or at the same time as therapeutically dealing with their own victimisation. This helps the individual recognise that their own victimisation was a contributing factor to their antisocial behaviour but not an “excuse.” Indeed, it has been emphasised that therapeutic work on victimisation history is necessary to eliminate offending behaviour (Burgess, Hartman, McCormack, & Grant, 1988).

With regard to therapeutic intervention with victims of childhood maltreatment, it is necessary to consider the differences between individuals who have experienced repeat victimisation by the same offender versus revictimisation by different offenders. For those repeatedly victimised, particularly by an intrafamilial perpetrator, the issues to be addressed concern self-blame, specificity of the victimisation, and betrayal of trust. With more than one perpetrator, it may be necessary to consider the individual’s feelings of general vulnerability and inability to prevent victimisation, especially when both intrafamilial and extrafamilial revictimisation are experienced.

With repeat victimisation, more often involving intrafamilial abuse and neglect, it is important to work with the whole family. This works with the offender to prevent further abuse, with the victim to reduce vulnerability to subsequent maltreatment, and with the nonabusing caregivers to offer protection. With revictimisation, the subsequent perpetrators are often unknown. Therefore, therapeutic work concentrates on helping the victim develop self-confidence, self-esteem, and strategies for protection. This has significant influence on susceptibility to being targeted by offenders in the future.

## CONCLUSION

It is imperative to recognise the intricacies of the pathways to break the cycle of victim to offender. This is particularly important for people who are working with victims of abuse to assess whether they are at risk of subsequent maltreatment and/or delinquency, as well as for people who are working with known young offenders who also have a history of victimisation. Details as to the way in which maltreatment has influenced offending behaviour would therefore aid the rehabilitation process. Ultimately, practical implementation of this knowledge could help to target those young people most at risk of committing serious offences to prevent either the initial or subsequent crimes from occurring.

## APPENDIX

### Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect Used for Child Protection Registers in England and Wales

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**Neglect:** The persistent or severe neglect of a child or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger. This includes cold and starvation or extreme failure to carry out important aspects of care that results in the significant impairment of the child's health or development, including nonorganic failure to thrive.

**Physical injury:** Actual or likely physical injury to a child or failure to prevent physical injury (or suffering) to a child, including deliberate poisoning, suffocation, and Munchausen's syndrome by proxy.

**Sexual abuse:** Actual or likely sexual exploitation of a child or adolescent. The child may be dependent and/or developmentally immature.

**Emotional abuse:** Actual or likely severe adverse effect on the emotional and behavioural development of a child caused by persistent or severe emotional maltreatment or rejection. All abuse involves some emotional maltreatment. This category is used where it is the main or sole form of abuse.

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NOTE: Definitions from "Working Together under the Children Act 1989": Home Office, Department of Health, Departments of Education and Science, and Welsh Office, 1991.

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## NOTE

1. Home Office referrals of convicted young offenders subject to Section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 consist of two groups. Those young offenders who have been found guilty of murder before their 18th birthday and are detained indeterminately (Section 53 [1]) and those convicted of a grave offence such as attempted murder, rape, or arson, below the age of 17 years, who are subject to a specified period of incarceration (Section 53 [2]).

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