Chapter 8

VIOLENT OFFENDING: AN ANALYSIS OF FAMILY, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY RISK FACTORS

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ABSTRACT

Violent offending by young people is a visibly growing problem for both society and the particular individuals involved. Recent research conducted in the United Kingdom revealed that over 20% of 10 to 25 year olds report having committed a crime, 59% of which were violent offences (Wilson, Sharp and Patterson, 2006). Prior research has examined particular factors that make children and adolescents more inclined to criminal activities and whether these factors are controllable. This study looks at the interaction of risk factors at the family, social and community levels by testing a causal model in a sample composed of 2528 participants aged 10-16 who were drawn from the 2005 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey dataset.

To begin with, the authors review some data on the prevalence of violent offending among young people in different countries, and continue by discussing some of the main family, school and community factors that have been related to involvement in violent offending and delinquent behaviours in adolescence. Family variables include quality of children-parent relationships and parenting skills such as family communication. School variables refer to attitude to school and whether the child has been suspended or expelled

from school. Finally, community variables include the existence of problem behaviours in the local area and degree of trust in local police.

Following this review, the authors analyse the role played by two other direct antecedents of offending that have been highlighted in the scientific literature, namely antisocial behaviour and victimization. Finally, a causal model is tested to examine the interactions among all the aforementioned variables and their joint contribution to the explanation of youth offending. The model tested explained 22% of the variance in violent offending by the young people in the sample. Victimization and anti-social behaviour independently contributed to the amount of variance, while family, community and school contexts had differential effects on these two proximal causes. By jointly considering the influence of the most important social contexts in adolescence, this study provides a fuller picture and clearer understanding of the risks for violent adolescent offending. Implications and future areas of research are discussed.

1. PREVALENCE OF VIOLENT OFFENDING AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

Youth violence is a visibly significant problem with extremely negative consequences for both society and the particular individuals involved. Although this is clear enough, it is less clear whether this is a growing or declining problem. The 2006 Offending Crime and Justice Survey (OCJS), conducted by the Home Office, found that 22% of 10 to 25 year olds in England and Wales reported committing a crime in 2006, 59% of which were violent offences (Roe and Ashe, 2008). Meanwhile, in the USA it has been reported that approximately 80% of non-fatal violent offences against young people are committed by juveniles (Baum, 2005). Statistics have indicated that arrests for simple and aggravated assaults have increased in comparison to previous years, in particular for adolescent females (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999), although the prototypical young offender continues to be a male aged between 15 and 17 (Grinberg, Dawkins, Dawkins and Fullilove, 2005). Two of the main sources of crime statistics in the USA are the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports (UCR). The NCVS, based on a survey of over 77,000 households, has reported that violent crime rates have actually declined since 1994, reaching in 2005 the lowest level ever recorded (Shannon, 2006). Meanwhile the UCR, which looks at crimes recorded by the police, has also painted a positive picture, reporting that although the violent crime rate increased by 1% from 2005 to 2006, the rate had actually fallen 22.5% from 1997 to 2006 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2006).

It is an extremely complex task to accurately compare violent crime statistics across countries due to the huge variety of ways that crimes are recorded. However, a survey that has successfully attempted to do this is The International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS), which has provided evidence on crime rates in 24 industrialised countries since 1989. According to respondents' answers in the ICVS, violent crimes were generally thought to be more serious than, for example, property crimes (Entorf and Spengler, 2002). The ICVS covers ten conventional crimes including contact crimes, which involve robbery, sexual offences and assault and threats. In 2000, rates of contact crimes per 100 inhabitants were found to be well above the average of 10.7 in countries such as England and Wales (20.5) and Australia (20.2) and much lower than average in Japan (3.8), Spain (4.2) and Portugal (4.5). Rather surprisingly the victimization rate for contact crimes in the USA was below average at

9.9 (van Kesteren, Mayhew and Nieuwbeerta, 2001). The most frequent of the three contact crimes were assault and threats. In the 2004/05 findings of the ICVS, 3.1% of respondents were found to be victims of assault and threats. Northern Ireland (6.8), Iceland, (5.9) England and Wales (5.8) and Ireland (4.9) had the highest prevalence of victimization whereas Italy (0.8) Portugal (0.9), Hungary (1.2) and Spain (1.6) had the lowest rates of assault and threats (Dijk, van, Kesteren and Smit, 2008).

In the last few decades, research has focused on analysing the risk factors related to violent offending and crime. We are particularly interested in analysing such behaviour among young people in order to better understand the reasons why some children and adolescents are inclined to criminal activities and whether these factors are controllable. The following section of this chapter will explore some of the more significant risk factors for violent crime among youths, giving particular consideration to social variables related to family, school and locality.

FACTORS RELATED TO VIOLENT OFFENDING

The term 'risk factor' refers to variables that increase an individual's susceptibility to a certain outcome (Shader, 2001). In recent years the risk factor paradigm has been applied to offending. According to Farrington (2000) the basic idea of this paradigm is to discover the key factors that increase the risk of becoming an offender and then to identify prevention methods to counteract them. The risk factor approach allows practitioners to tailor prevention programmes to the unique needs of individual youths and their communities. Hawkins et al. (2000), among others, stated that it is unlikely that one risk factor can cause violent behaviour, but it is the combination of multiple risk factors that can group together to shape behaviour and heighten the risk of becoming involved in youth violence. They suggested that it is the presence of a combination of certain risk factors that can lead to delinquency.

Three decades ago, Bronfenbrenner (1979) presented the influential ecological paradigm, which explained human development as a function of nested systems of the person, their environment and the interaction of these components. Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed that it is not just the environment that directly affects the person but there are layers in between that all affect each other. He described four systems that each contain roles and norms shaping development. These include the microsystem constituted by the immediate environment (e.g., family, school, neighbourhood); the mesosystem, which entails connections between immediate environments (e.g., a child's family and neighbourhood, for example); an exosystem of those external environmental settings that affect development indirectly (e.g., a parent's workplace); and the macrosystem of the larger cultural context. Thus, this approach suggests that most human behaviours are multiply determined, and youth offending is not an exception.

A more recent study conducted by Vander Zanden, Crandell and Crandell (2007) applied Bronfenbrenner's theory to the example of an inner-city family who may face many different challenges compared to those of an affluent family in a secure community. For instance, an inner-city family may experience crime and disorders more frequently, whereas an affluent family may lack support from an extended family network. In the next paragraphs we

introduce some of the most relevant risk factors related to youth offending, taking into account the importance of interactions among these various social systems and contexts.

2.1. Family Factors

Family environment has been suggested to be extremely important in shaping children's behaviour and attitudes. In particular, the quality of relationship between child and parent, together with parenting skills, are central areas of importance (Dekovic, Janssens, and van As, 2003). Some studies have found that individuals who report having a negative relationship with their parents are more likely to be involved in delinquent behaviour (e.g., Wissink, Dekovic and Meijer, 2006). Others (e.g., Maguin et al., 1995). have suggested that being exposed to high levels of family conflict may increase the likelihood of future violent behaviour in adolescents.

Also poor parenting skills, including failure to set clear expectations, and setting severe or inconsistent discipline parameters, are predictive of violent youth offending (Wells and Rankin, 1988). Studies conducted by Farrington, Loeber, Yin and Anderson (2002) supported these findings and also showed that males who are are frequently involved in family activities are at a higher risk of being involved in delinquency. There may also be a link between family environment and victimization. However, research into this particular relationship is more limited. Bowers, Smith and Binney (1994) studied how bully-victims, people who bully and are bullied, perceive their family environment. They found that bully-victims tend to report poor relationships with their parents, a lack of supervision, inconsistent discipline and a lack of warmth. If children perceive a negative family context they may feel less supported by their parents and could be more vulnerable to becoming a victim of personal crime. Hawkins et al. (2000) noted the importance of caregivers' involvement and communication with their child. In addition children must be shown affection, support and clear boundaries (Lipsey and Derzon, 1998). In summary, previous research indicates that parenting skills and whether the child gets on well with his or her parents are risk factors for delinquent behaviour including violent offending.

2.2. School Factors

Children spend many of their waking hours at school and, after the family, it is one of the most important socialisation contexts in childhood and adolescence. Consequently, school attitudes and behaviours are a key area when exploring possible risk factors. The perception of importance of school is crucial. Thus, Smith (2006) found that negative attitudes towards school was a relevant risk factor indirectly related to criminal activity through misbehaviour at school. Likewise, Hirschi (1969) found that individuals who were committed to school were less likely to be involved in delinquent activities in comparison with those who showed a weak attachment. These findings have been supported by studies carried out in a variety of different cultures (Leblanc, 1994; Moncher and Miller, 1999; Thornberry, Lizotte, Krohn, Farnworth, and Joon Jang, 1991). In fact, Carroll, Houghton, Hattie and Durkin (1999) suggested that educational and delinquent goals can be seen as opposites. Thus, in order to

improve children's perceptions of the importance of school, parents and teachers should be encouraged to motivate and inform children about the value of education.

Another important factor closely related to misbehaviour at school and subsequent escalation into serious offending is, as some studies suggest, the fact that in many schools these undesirable behaviours lead to temporary suspension or even expulsion as disciplinary measures. Such action is unlikely to reduce undesirable behaviour (Smith 2006), and what is more, seems to foster involvement in offending behaviour (McAra, 2004). In a study carried out by Bilchik (1999) it was found that boys who had been suspended reported committing many more delinquent acts than those had not been suspended. Bilchik (1999) explained that this may be due to the suspended boys having more time on their hands to get into trouble. Likewise, those who were not attending school committed nearly four times as many delinquent acts compared to those who were attending school. It has been suggested that this link is related to the extra time without supervision that most of these adolescents spend on the streets (Arum and Beattie, 1999). Instead, controlling and preventing misbehaviour within schools may be more effective than using expulsion from school as a punishment measure.

2.3. Community Factors

As well as children's family and school environment, their local area may also influence their attitudes and behaviours. For instance, McCord, Widom and Crowell (2001) found that living in a poor area where there is noticeable crime increased the likelihood of children becoming involved in crime. This association was explained by suggesting that the child learns about people's values through observation of their neighbourhood, which shapes their perceptions of acceptable social behaviour. Therefore, when a child observes frequent delinquent activities occurring in their neighbourhood they may perceive such behaviours as *normal* and acceptable and thus be more likely to commit antisocial behaviour themselves. Some other researchers have also suggested that perception of general neighbourhood conditions influences attitudes towards police and social norms, especially when negative conditions are considered in terms of the functions and control of these formal authorities (Christenson and Taylor, 1983; Weitzer and Tuch, 2004).

One study conducted in the USA by Hurst and Frank (2000), revealed that juveniles who believed that conditions in their communities were worse than in others held the authorities responsible for not engaging in the same enforcement effort in their communities and they generally showed less favourable attitudes towards the police. These findings are of great importance if we take into account the established close association between attitude towards institutional authority and antisocial and offending behaviour in adolescence (Emler and Reicher, 1995, 2005; Tarry and Emler, 2007). Emler and Reicher (2005) argue that a possible explanation for this could be because some young people who do not feel protected by the police decide they have to take the law into their own hands and build up a dangerous reputation in order to protect themselves from victimization. Although lack of trust in the police has previously been linked to antisocial behaviour and delinquency, there may also be a relationship with victimization (Reicher and Emler, 1985). Children may have had negative experiences of the police after being victimized, which could lead to them having lower levels of trust in the police. Another possibility is that the children's lack of trust in the police heightens their vulnerability to victimization because the offender does not think the victim

will report the crime and therefore the offender's behaviour is less likely to be punished (Shaffer and Ruback, 2002). Trust in the police is an interesting factor that may show whether children feel safe in their community and further research into this relationship would be useful in order to throroughly understand.these links.

3. ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND VICTIMIZATION AS DIRECT ANTECEDENTS OF OFFENDING

Together with family, school and community factors, the scientific literature has highlighted two other factors that are closely related to offending among young people, namely antisocial behaviour and victimization. Moreover, it is possible that all the previously mentioned factors are interrelated and jointly explain youth offending. As we suggest in the next section, in which we present a hypothetical structural model, calculated on the basis of a sample composed of more than 2500 adolescents, family, school and community factors may exert significant influences on children's likelihood both of developing antisocial behaviours and of being victims of crime. These two latter, in turn, have been found to be closely linked to offending, as we note in the following paragraphs. Let us start with the relationship between antisocial and offending behaviour.

Although it is well-known that early and middle adolescence are periods of heightened involvement in anti-social activities, it is also true that there are remarkable individual differences in the frequency and stability of such involvement. Thus, and following Moffit's (1993) theory of antisocial behaviour among young people, most adolescents will behave antisocially only temporarily in this period of life; this behaviour will probably not continue into adulthood. However, a minority will show persistent and stable antisocial behaviour which will increase in seriousness and extremity. According to Moffit's (1993) life-course persistent problem behaviour theory, there is a causal sequence beginning very early in life with the formative years dominated by cumulative and negative person-environment interactions, which give little opportunity for adolescents to learn new behavioural repertoires of prosocial alternatives or to practice conventional social skills.

This idea has also been highlighted in a recent longitudinal study conducted by Weisner, Kim and Capaldi (2005), in which the authors suggest that early involvement in antisocial behaviour decreases an individual's opportunities to interact positively with others and conversely fosters the chance of affiliation with deviant peers, trapping the individual in a risky and dangerous lifestyle. Alongside this process, there seems to be an escalating involvement in antisocial behaviours, that is to say, a progression from minor to more serious offending activity (Pudney, 2002). Minor offences are usually antisocial acts, typically defined as acts that disturb the peace and disrupt the social order and that are likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to members of neighborhood or community (Crime and Disorder Act, 1998, UK). These behaviours, however, may leave the door open for other less *trivial* acts that explicitly entail criminal offending such as shoplifting. In fact, theft (including shoplifting) has been documented as being the most common offence committed by young people, and can be considered as the prototypical *initial* crime for both genders (Barry, 2006; Cunneen and White, 2002; Rutter, Guiller, and Hagell, 1998).

The question of whether or not victimization predicts offending has also been addressed in several studies in the last two decades. In the Offending, Crime and Justice Survey published in 2006 in the United Kingdom, it was found that half (50%) of the youths who had committed a core offence in the last 12 months had also been a victim of crime, compared with 19% of non-offenders (Roe and Ashe, 2008). Previous studies have indicated that young people who have been victimized report greater involvement in delinquent activities (Wiebush, Freitag, and Baird, 2001). Indeed, according to some authors, being a victim of personal crime is one of the most important warning signals for future offending (Shaffer and Ruback, 2002; Smith and Ecob, 2007) and a risk factor even in adulthood (Ford, 2002). More specifically, in the recent study carried out by Shafer and Ruback (2002) with more than 5,000 adolescents from 11 to 17 years old, it was found that prior victimization predicted subsequent violent offending one year later (52% among victims *versus* 17% among non-victims).

Various criminological theories have been developed to interpret the victim-offender link. According to both lifestyle exposure theory (Hinderlang, Gottfredson, and Galofalo, 1978) and routine activities theory (Cohen and Felson, 1979), the risks of criminal victimization principally arise from individuals' lifestyles and routine activities. As Hinderlang et al. (1978) suggest, since individuals are more likely to interact with those who are similar to themselves, the victimization risk is directly proportional to the number of characteristics shared with offenders or to the similarity of their shared lifestyle. This idea implies, on the one hand, that being a victim of crime is linked to exposure or proximity to offender populations or communities and, on the other, that offenders are more likely to become victims of crime because their lifestyles frequently bring them to interact with other offenders (Sampson and Lauritsen, 1990).

The subculture of violence theory, formulated by Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967), proposes that in certain areas and for certain groups, there is a sub-culturally valued system that supports the use of violence. From this perspective, victims of crime may become offenders because of the existence of 'norms' which justify retaliation, and offenders may become victims because they hold values that endorse the use of violence to resolve conflicts (Singer, 1981, 1986; see also Emler and Ohana, 1992). In these subcultures, harm and violence are seen as legitimate responses and the value system within the group supports this way of resolving disagreements (Deadman and MacDonald, 2004). From a more psychological perspective, social learning theory suggests that experiencing violence as a victim may result in the victim learning violent behaviours (Siegfried, Ko and Kelley, 2004); other researches believe that trauma makes a significant contribution in the explanation of the victim-aggressor link, since victimization and exposure to the feeling of not being safe may develop into a state of chronic threat which in turn leads the young person to get involved in defiant and violent behaviours (Schwab-Stone et al., 1995).

Young people surrounded by a negative environment may become desensitized to violence and hence be more likely to engage in high risk activities (antisocial acts, drug use, offending). Or they may decide to respond to their own experience of victimization through revenge or even protective aggression. Following Emler (in press), some youths turn to antisocial and offending behaviour in the search of protection that they do not find in formal authority (teachers, the criminal justice system); such a traumatic event in the life of a child or adolescent as being a victim of crime may undermine confidence in adults' safety and protection, in turn resulting in 'disappointment' in authority figures and subsequent

involvement in misbehaviours, pursued as the best remedy for reducing the risk of being victimized further.

4. A MODEL OF INTERACTIONS AMONG EXPLANATORY VARIABLES

On the basis of the findings reviewed in the previous sections, we devised and tested a structural model of interactions with the aim of exploring the ways in which the most relevant social context for young people (family, school and community) and the fact of having been victimized and/or being involved in antisocial behaviour, exert an influence on participation in violent offending.

With this purpose, we used data from the 2005 Offending Crime and Justice Survey (OCJS), which was jointly conducted for the Home Office by the British Market Research Bureau (BMRB) and the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen). The general aim of the 2005 OCJS was to examine the extent of offending across the household population and covered offences against businesses as well as those against individuals and households. The survey also looks at the personal victimization of young people.

This data has been made publicly available through the UK Data Archive (2007). A multi-staged stratified random sample was used to recruit participants and addresses were randomly selected from the postcode address file. The total sample number used in the present study included 2528 youths aged 10 to 16, 53% of whom were males (n=1328) and 47% were females (n=1200), living in households within England and Wales.

We used AMOS version 6.0 (Arbuckle, 2005) Structural Equation Program to test a number of interactions with an outcome of violent youth offending. We grouped variables based on existing measures in the OCJS, obtaining the six following latent factors: (1) Family context: respondents were asked about the quality of their relationships with parents and perceived parental skills (e.g. "my parent(s) usually listen to me when I want to talk"; "my parent(s) usually treat me fairly when I have done something wrong"); (2) School context: respondents were asked about their attitudes to school and studies, as well as whether they had been excluded from school in the previous 12 months; (3) Local context: respondents were asked about the existence of a series of disorder problems in their local area (e.g., teenagers hanging around causing problems, people being drunk or rowdy in public, rubbish or litter lying around) and their degree of trust in the local police; (4) Antisocial behaviour: respondents were asked whether they had been involved in antisocial behaviours in the 12 months prior to interview (e.g., written things or sprayed paint on a building, fence, train or anywhere else where the child should not have, threatened or been rude to someone because of their skin colour, race or religion); (5) Victimization: respondents were asked whether they had been a victim of crime in the 12 months prior to interview (e.g. assault with injury, personal robbery).

Figure 1 shows the structural model calculated. Continuous lines represent significant paths among factors and curved lines represent correlations among latent variables. The model showed a generally good fit with the data as interpreted by the indicators CFI = .97, NFI= .96 and RMSEA = .04. For the CFI and NFI fit indexes, the consensus is that values

above .95 or higher are acceptable; for the RMSEA this is the case of values of .05 or less (Batista and Coenders, 2000).
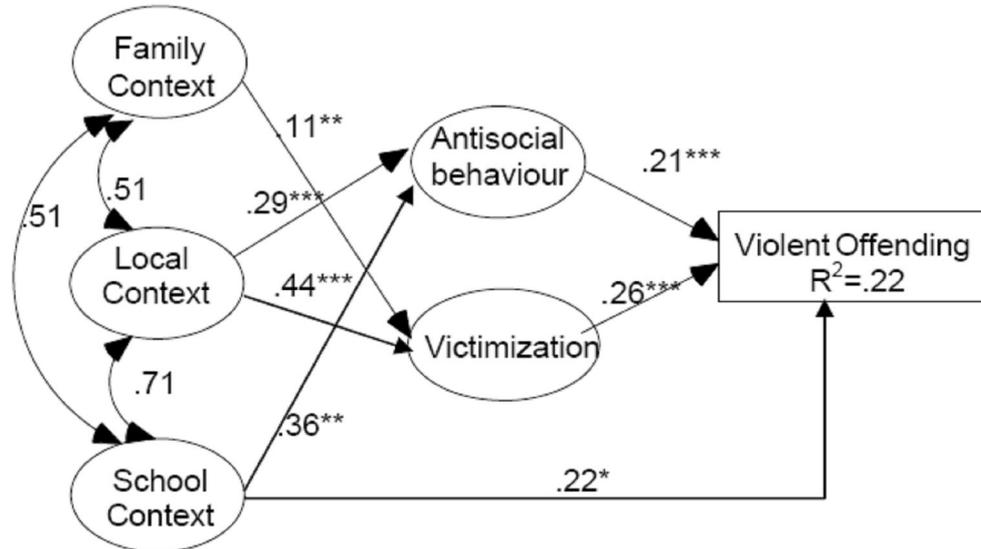

Figure 1. Structural equation model to predict youth violent offending (Significance of the standardized paths is: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001).

The model accounted for 22% of the variance in youth offending. In the analysis of the direct associations between family, school and local contexts (negatively coded), only the school setting showed a significant direct influence on offending (β =.22, p <.05). Direct associations with violent offending were also found with being involved in anti-social behaviour (β =.21, p <.001) and having been a victim of crime (β =.26, p <.001). Family and community contexts did not show a direct relationship with offending; instead the model suggested an indirect influence of these variables mediated by their impact on antisocial behaviour and victimization. Family context (β =.11, p <.01; the respondent reported not getting on well with their parents and perceived poor parenting skills), and local area (β =.44, p <.001; the respondent perceived higher levels of disorder in their local area and did not trust the local police) were significant predictors of victimization. Meanwhile, school context (β =.36, p <.01; the respondent had been excluded and held a negative attitude towards school and studies) and also local area (β =.29, p<.001) were significant predictors of anti-social behaviour. The robustness of this model was analysed further by testing the measurement and structural invariance across gender groups through multi-group analyses.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERVENTION AND FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The data are cross sectional and correlational, so caution is necessary in making causal inferences. And it would be unwise to treat the structural model tested above uncritically as a description of the relevant causal relations. Moreover, the outcome of the modelling is to

some extent bounded by the data available. With these provisos, the findings give grounds for concluding that there are two clear and distinct influences on the emergence of violent offending. One operates through the immediate impact of anti-social behaviour, the other through the immediate impact of victimization. This is potentially an important conclusion for what it rules out, in particular that victimization is merely a side effect of anti-social and violent behaviour. In this section we speculate a little further on the detail that may underlie these two routes, though we seek to root our speculation on what else is known about causes of crime. And we draw out what appear to be the implications for intervention as well as the pointers to areas of uncertainty that would merit further investigation.

The first route to violent offending to which our model points is essentially one of continuity and escalation. A considerable body of research now supports the view that interindividual variations in anti-social inclination are stable over time. Longitudinal research traces these individual differences back into early childhood, and through the course of childhood a feedback loop will have been established between childhood temperament and parental response. Thus the family context is not irrelevant to this route, but its impact lies further in the past.

But what of the two aspects of the microsystem that appear to matter more in the earlier teenage years, the local and school context? Note first of all that these two contexts are very strongly interrelated, and indeed that both are strongly related to the family context. Thus, living in a neighbourhood characterised by disorder is associated with a poor relation with school, while both are also linked to poor relations with parents. There are two obvious ways in which neighbourhood conditions are likely to have amplifying effects on behavioural inclinations. One is through the communication of behavioural norms. Trouble making groups, rowdy drunks, and littered streets all communicate rather different norms to those expressed through their absence. The other is through provision of a like-minded peer group. The close link between delinquency and having delinquent associates is well known and further reinforced by the connection between gang membership and anti-social behaviour. And other work has shown that one factor predicting gang membership is residential instablility (Dupere et al., 2007). One might expect that neighbourhoods characterised by residential instability will lack the informal social control mechanisms that otherwise help to limit delinquency.

The school context encompasses a set of factors that are more likely to be implicated in a feedback relationship with anti-social behaviour. Kids who are disposed to misbehave find the regime of school uncongenial and their relations with school become increasingly abrasive, ultimately leading to exclusion. At the same time the labelling that takes place in the educational setting further reinforces a delinquent reputation (Adams and Evans, 1996), and the more explicit labelling entailed in exclusion further amplifies delinquent activity But the direct link found, in testing the model, between school context and violent offending may more accurately reflect an influence running in the other direction: young people who are violent are in consequence more at risk of exclusion.

This is part of a more general truth, a caution against the the expectation that a simple linear model can fully capture the patterns of cause and effect in which violent of offending is enmeshed. A pattern of individual behaviour can never be only an outcome of environmental forces; it will feed back into the individual's social environment, affecting the way that others, individually, collectively and as institutional actors, respond and react.

The pattern around victimization also embodies this truth. Other work shows that gang membership amplifies criminal activity, but also raises the risk of victimization (Decker et al., 2008). Increased victimization is plausibly an outcome of violent behaviour as gang retaliates against gang. But experience of victimization also feeds into violent offending. The impact of locality could be of two kinds. First a community in which social order is precarious is one whose individual members are exposed to greater risk of victimization. Second, if actual victimization is accompanied by lack of effective police response this would also undermine trust in the police. This could in turn support a resort to violence, whether as a strategic response to the perceived hazard of victimization or as direct action to redress grievances. The strength of the direct path from locality to victimization in the model is striking. We suspect this is in part because the locality variable includes trust/mistrust in the police, which with stronger measures of this attitude would emerge as a joint consequence of victimization and impoverished local context.

The weaker path from family context to victimization may be amenable to a more straightforward interpretation. For some children, treatment at the hands of their parents undoubtedly amounts to victimization, and the route from victim (of child abuse) to offender is well documented (Anderson, 2005; Stouthamer-Loeber et al, 2001).

Turning to the implications for intervention and prevention, the first message must be that there is no single lever to pull, no uniquely effective point of intervention. At the same time some levers are more accessible than others, and some are already very familiar. Thus, we already know that parenting skills matter and the present findings only reinforce the desirability of supporting their enhancement. Likewise the hazards consequent on child abuse are beginning to receive more attention and to attract a stronger response. There is also growing awareness that schools play a critical role in the labelling process and that measures such as exclusion may only exaggerate the effects they are intended to reverse.

What is perhaps newer is the message that action to improve order in communities would pay dividends. And at the heart of this is community policing; community order founded on effective policing should both reduce the risk of victimization and increase confidence in the protection the law should provide. This leads us to our nomination for the most fruitful focus of further research. To untangle the relations between community conditions, victimization, policing and violent offending will require research that is both longitudinal and based on stronger measures of all the relevant variables. In particular the data set available to us could not distinguish sufficiently between neighbourhood conditions and trust in the police. We need to understand better how these are interrelated and how they are different, as well as how they are each connected to the experience of victimization.

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