

REPEAT VICTIMISATION: TAKING STOCK

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Summary

A considerable programme of research on repeat victimisation (RV) has been carried out in recent years - much of it by Professor Ken Pease, OBE, with the support of the Home Office. This report is his view of 'the state of the art' - what we know so far and what we need to do in order to make the most of this knowledge. Although the extent of RV is known, its wider implications for crime control remain largely unrecognised. The report aims to fill this gap and make the full range of recent RV research and thinking accessible to a police audience.

What previous RV research shows

Important conclusions from previous work are that victimisation is the best single predictor of victimisation; that when victimisation recurs it tends to do so quickly; that high crime rates and hotspots are as they are substantially because of rates of repeat victimisation; that a major reason for repetition is that offenders take later advantage of opportunities which the first offence presents; and that those who repeatedly victimise the same target tend to be more established in crime careers than those who do not.

Crime predicts crime at the area level as well as the individual level. This is important because taking police and other resources to repeat victims automatically takes them to places where crime is high. There are a number of demonstration projects (Fig.1) which have shown clearly the benefits that targeting RV can have.

Fig. 1: Examples of effective action

GMP project on the Kirkholt housing estate, Rochdale: 72% reduction in domestic burglary. Reduction of repeat burglaries to almost zero.

Huddersfield "Biting Back" project: reduction in domestic burglary of 24% and reduced levels of repeat burglary.

Divisional RV programme in Stockport: reduction in domestic burglary of 21% and a 44% reduction in the number of repeats.

Each of the demonstration projects has shown that an overall crime reduction can be achieved by reducing the revictimisation of those places and people suffering the most crime. The advantages of preventing RV as a strategy for crime control are therefore clear. (Fig.2)

Fig. 2: Advantages to using RV prevention as a strategy for crime control

Focusing on repeats:

- automatically concentrates effort on areas of highest crime;
- automatically concentrates on individuals at greatest risk;
- fuses the roles of victim support and crime prevention which have been historically separated;
- explicitly links the police tasks of prevention and detection;
- provides a way of targeting prolific offenders; and,
- makes the clearance of a series of crimes more likely than when they were viewed independently.

Repeat victims and repeat offenders

Research shows that offenders who commit RV against the same target are often the same offenders who committed the previous offence. The evidence about the proportion of RV attributable to the same offenders is not wholly conclusive - but is consistent across different sources - both from analysis of victim accounts and from police statistics of recorded crime. One study has shown that in 80% of cases where a crime is repeated against the same target and more than one crime in the series is cleared, the perpetrator is the same person. At least some of this RV occurs because the first offence educates an offender in ways which boost the risk of RV making it easier, more attractive or more profitable.

Recent research also shows that offenders who repeatedly victimise the same target are more committed and more prolific offenders than those who do not. Further research showed that repeat robbers of the same target are more determined, more likely to carry a loaded gun, and more likely to have committed a robbery where someone had been injured. They had longer criminal records, and were more likely to have

been in prison before. They planned their robberies more, and were more likely to have worn a disguise. If particular effort is made to detect RV then we know that those detected will be disproportionately more committed criminals.

The strategy of defining repeats

If crime prevention is taken to be the main reason for defining repeats, then a consideration of both people and place is needed. For example, if a car is parked in a safe area with the doors unlocked and the key in the ignition and is repeatedly stolen, then the preventative action needs to come from a change in driver behaviour. If, in contrast, another car is left secure and immobilised but is still broken into repeatedly - then prevention of RV may come from a change in the place that the car is left. Substantial benefits could therefore result from a police information system that provides adequate information in respect of victims, place of victimisation and offenders.

The tactics of defining repeats

The police are currently confronting many practical issues in measuring RV. The report outlines an approach to these tactical problems which suggests:

- Only offences of the same sort should be sought when analysing RV.
- The period over which information on prior victimisation is sought should be one year, and should coincide as closely as possible with the relevant national victimisation survey (e.g. British Crime Survey).
- Attempts should contribute towards counts of repetition because they are predictive of the possibility of later completions and a marker of risk.

- Repeat reduction should not be aggregated across crime types. This conflates offences like shop theft - where repeats can be prevented with relative ease with offences where this is not the case.
- People should be asked about prior victimisation when they are representatives of households, but not when they are agents of others. In the case of business crime, the unit of analysis should be the branch and not the owner.
- Place information (including information such as vertical location) should be included in police data sets at the most disaggregated practicable level.
- It should also be made clear that any information gathered by an officer about unrecorded prior victimisation's should have the status of intelligence not crime report.

Points for action

RV draws attention to the victim, time, place and possible perpetrator of a likely future crime. Key action needed to realise the benefits of addressing RV as a strategy of crime control includes:

- Using prevention and detection as complementary elements in a sequenced crime reduction process. Although they have traditionally been treated as separate entities, repeat victimisation draws the two functions together and demonstrates that they are only distinct if one considers one crime at a time.
- Bringing together information on offenders, victims and places into a single database to enable preventative strategies to be formulated more systematically and effectively.
- Improving police information systems to incorporate better recordings of repeat crime. Good quality crime report information needs to be obtained and systems need to be able to link RV against the same place or person.

Other related PRG papers

Preventing repeat victimisation: the police officers guide	<i>Cressida Bridgeman and Louise Hobbs (1997)</i>
CDPS 82 Biting Back II: Reducing Repeat Victimisation in Huddersfield	<i>Sylvia Chenery, John Holt, Ken Pease (1997)</i>
Briefing Note 4/95 Preventing repeat victimisation: a report on progress in Huddersfield	<i>David Anderson, Sylvia Chenery, Ken Pease (1995)</i>
CDPS 58 Biting Back: Tackling Repeat Burglary and Car Crime	<i>David Anderson, Sylvia Chenery, Ken Pease (1995)</i>
Wise After the Event: Tackling Repeat Victimisation	<i>Cressida Bridgeman and Alice Sampson (Report by the National Board for Crime Prevention, 1994)</i>
CPU 42 Once Bitten, Twice Bitten: Repeat Victimisation and its implications for Crime Prevention	<i>Graham Farrell and Ken Pease (1993)</i>