

## **Repeat Victimization of Prison Inmates**

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## REPEAT VICTIMIZATION OF PRISON INMATES

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### ABSTRACT

*Inspired and led by the work of Ken Pease, research into the prevention of repeat victimization has progressed significantly over the last two decades. Here, a victimization survey of prison inmates is examined. It shows most victimization of inmates by other inmates is repeats, most victimization of inmates by prison staff is repeats, and that inmates who report victimization of one type are more prone to other types. Likewise, inmates who report discrimination in their access to facilities and services are more likely to report multiple types of discrimination. Further, those inmates who are the victims of other inmates are also more likely to be victimized by prison staff and to be discriminated against. While prisons might be expected to be a challenging environment in which to develop the prevention of repeat victimization, this should not preclude some effort.*

## INTRODUCTION

The study of repeat victimization has progressed significantly in the two decades since Ken Pease directed the Kirkholt burglary prevention project (Forrester et al. 1988, Pease 1991). Types of repeat victimization identified to date are listed in Table 1. The types of repeat often overlap. A repeat bank robbery involves the same target but may also involve the same offender using the same method (even if that is brandishing a banana in a paper bag to make it look like a gun). Repeat victimization is known to cluster in time, one crime following another in quick succession. Hot spots of spatial repeats are often focused on the same target (Pease and Laycock 1996), but when different crimes occur in close proximity (such as assaults, robbery, and drug dealing at a bar, or theft and robbery from a store), then it is the spatial repetition of the location that is the common factor of such risky facilities (see Eck et al., this volume). Much recent progress has built on Pease's (1998) notion of virtual repeats which ingeniously combined elements of tactical, crime-type, spatial and offender repeats to describe victimization of similar targets in comparable circumstances. The successive mugging of identical twins was his hypothetical limiting case for illustration, but break-ins to identical cars, same-layout houses, or racially-motivated attacks against persons of similar skin color, are the more likely reality (see Townsley et al. 2003 on near-repeat burglaries). High rates of theft of certain hot products (Clarke 1999) such as mobile phones, computer laptops or SatNav systems are linked by the repetition of target characteristics as well as, often, *modus operandi* and the same offenders. While prediction has always been central to preventing repeat victimization, Johnson, Bowers and Pease (2005) took it to a new level by predicting burglary of alike nearby properties (tactical and spatial repeats) which were

*not previously victimized* – work which Johnson and Bowers continue in this volume.

Prospective prediction should have much research mileage, and many lessons for crime prevention practice, when transferred to other forms of virtual repeat.

The overarching theme of the body of work related to repeat victimization is that crime is remarkably concentrated. Crime's aggregate tendency to cluster appears almost without regard for context in which, or dimension along which, it is studied. Unpacking the various types of repeat victimization should facilitate the development of appropriate crime prevention practice, and Table 1 seeks to continue this effort.

**Table 1: Types of Repeat**

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Target repeats</i> – the repeated victimization of the same target, whether a person, place, vehicle or other target however defined</li><li>• <i>Tactical repeats</i> – includes frequent theft of hot products, is an element of burglary of similar-design households, and other repetitive crimes linked by target characteristics and/or modus operandi</li><li>• <i>Spatial repeats</i> – crime repeated within a certain spatial proximity, captured on maps as hot dots, hot spots or risky facilities, and sometimes involving different types of crime</li><li>• <i>Crime-type repeats</i> – offenders repeat the same types of crime because they have the resources, skills and experience. Same-crime repeats against the same target or virtual target are more likely.</li><li>• <i>Temporal repeats</i> – crimes committed quickly to maximize perceived benefits, or perhaps as a spree, often linked to spatial and tactical repetition. Repeats against the same target as well as virtual repeats cluster in time.</li><li>• <i>Offender repeats</i> – the role and prominence of repeat offending has been well established. Repeats are more likely to be committed by the same offenders.</li></ul> |
|---|

A two-dimensional version of Table 1 is conceivable, where the other dimension is the routine activity variables of target/victim, location, and offender (requiring some modification of this initial list), but this is a next step outside the scope of the present study. However, what is clear is that as research relating to repeat victimization has

progressed, so too has understanding of the relevant concepts. There are now numerous studies of various types of repeated personal and property crimes covering many countries, diverse sources of data and research methods. A recent addition to the list which is not necessarily intuitively obvious, is the study of repeated kidnapping (Reynald, 2005). Cyberspace is no exception, as Moitra and Kondo (2004) demonstrate in relation to repeated computer network attacks. Their study of network root break-ins, account break-ins, denials of service, corruption of information, access attempts, and disclosure of information, found a quarter of networks experienced three or more attacks and averaged 12 each, while the top-ten most victimized averaged 369 attacks each. We anticipate crime relating to e-services will result in similar patterns, so that preventing repeat victimization should be used to inform crime prevention in this arena. In the context of significant progress in the understanding and definition of repeat victimization in recent years, the present study has a modest aim. It seeks to add to the study of repeat victimization of prison inmates.

Prison victimization rates are notoriously high compared to other locations. Cooley (1993) claims inmate-on-inmate assault rates are three times that of the general community and twice that of a similar demographic group (see Wortley 2002). Prisons present different victimization possibilities to other locations, although these will vary from prison to prison. Yet the close personal proximities and frequent interaction with the same persons that prison life fosters seem likely to precipitate relationships that can become violent and remain so (see O'Donnell and Edgar 1996, Edgar and O'Donnell, 1998, Hochstetler et al. 2004). The research presented here is an exploratory analysis of a

prison victimization survey. The results of the survey suggest that, reflecting different opportunities, the types of incident which repeat in prison are not necessarily those which repeat elsewhere. While prisons may prove a difficult environment in which to prevent repeat victimization, this should not preclude some effort, and the likelihood of developing situational crime prevention in prisons is promising (Wortley 2002, Hulley and Smith 2005).

## **METHOD**

The analysis is based on a survey of eight prisons, the main details and findings of which were published elsewhere (Burnett and Farrell 1994). The main report of the study did not fully exploit the survey's potential to shed light on the repeated nature of incidents. The survey asked inmates about their experiences in the three months preceding the survey. While a three-month reference period minimizes memory problems that can affect respondent recall, it is a short time-window in which to measure repeated incidents that occur over time. Consequently, it would be expected that the repeat victimization rates reported here are conservative estimates.

Five hundred and one prison inmates from eight penal establishments were interviewed face-to-face. Ethnic minority inmates were over-sampled to facilitate analysis by ethnic group. To account for this, a weighting was applied for the present analysis. The weighting (available upon request from the authors) sought to make the sample representative of the ethnic groups in the national prison population at the time. Weighting a relatively small sample always introduces some error, but the findings below

are presented in the expectation that key patterns will prove sufficiently robust to justify this exploratory analysis.

## **FINDINGS**

By means of introduction, an overview of the frequency of victimization of inmates by other inmates and by staff is shown in Table 2. About 15 percent of inmates experience close to 90 percent of incidents from each source (those in the row of 5+ incidents). It is not necessarily the same individuals who are victimized by inmates and by staff, but this point is returned to later.

**Table 2: Victimization of Inmates**

<b>Number of Incidents</b>	<b>By Inmates</b>		<b>By Staff</b>	
	<b>% Inmates</b>	<b>% Incidents</b>	<b>% Inmates</b>	<b>% Incidents</b>
0	54.9	0.0	64.6	0.0
1	12.0	2.4	5.2	1.1
2	5.4	2.2	4.9	2.0
3	11.1	6.7	5.4	3.4
4	3.2	2.6	5.0	4.2
5+	13.5	86.1	15.0	89.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

### **Repeats by Other Inmates**

Table 3 shows victimization of inmates by inmates over a three-month period, ranked by the concentration rate, that is, the average number of repeats (the exception to the ranking is 'all types of incident' which is shown last). Nearly half of inmates (45.5%) experienced some form of victimization in the previous three months. Generally speaking, victimization concentration did not necessarily increase as the prevalence of an incident

type. Harassment, verbal abuse and exclusion were the types of incident most repeated. Of these three, only verbal abuse was unusually prevalent. Experienced by a quarter of inmates, verbal abuse was repeated twelve times per recipient (that is, approximately once per week over the three month reference period). In contrast, only three or four percent of inmates experienced harassment or exclusion by other inmates, but reported an average of around a dozen such incidents if they did. Even though such average rates mask some large outliers (a tiny fraction of inmates reported an incident per day), they give some indication of the unequal distribution of incidents.

**Table 3: Victimization of Inmates by Inmates**

<b>Type of incident</b>	<b>Concentration (incidents per victim)</b>	<b>Prevalence (victims per 100 inmates)</b>	<b>% Repeats (% of total incidents)</b>
Harassment	13.2	3.7	92%
Verbal Abuse	12.0	26.1	92%
Exclusion	11.5	3.1	91%
Bullying	5.5	9.7	82%
Taxing	4.5	0.9	78%
Robbery	2.6	0.8	62%
Sexual Assault	2.5	0.1	60%
Assault	1.4	8.5	27%
Theft	1.3	17.5	25%
Any type of incident	10.9	45.1	91%

One in ten inmates reported having been bullied in the previous three months, but victims experienced an average of more than five incidents each. While taxing (extortion) and robbery were relatively rare, being experienced by one in 100 inmates, victims experienced an average of 4.5 and 2.6 incidents each respectively in the three month period.



Most incidents were repeats of previous victimizations even for this three month period (Table 3, final column). Repeat incidents made up over ninety percent of all incidents, and of harassment, verbal abuse and exclusionary acts. Around eighty percent of bullying and taxing were repeats, sixty or so percent of robberies and sexual assaults, and around a quarter of thefts and sexual assaults (though the sample size for the latter was tiny so it should be read with caution).

### **Repeats by Prison Staff**

Slightly more than a third of inmates had been victimized by prison staff in the preceding three months (see Table 4). Verbal abuse, bullying and harassment were the most prevalent types of victimization, and the most frequently repeated. Table 4 is ranked by the concentration rate except for Any Type of Incident which is shown last. The list of categories of incident type about which information was collected was shorter than for inmate-inmate incidents. Both concentration and prevalence were relatively high for verbal abuse and harassment by staff. The prevalence and frequency of theft and assault were low in comparison to the other types of incident.

**Table 4: Victimization of Inmates by Staff**

<b>Type of incident</b>	<b>Concentration (incidents per victim)</b>	<b>Prevalence (victims per 100 inmates)</b>	<b>% Repeats (% of total incidents)</b>
Verbal abuse	10.9	22.8	90.9
Bullying	8.6	10.2	88.4
Harassment	7.9	17.6	87.4
Assaults	1.4	2.8	28.0
Theft	1.1	3.6	12.5
Any Type of Incident	13.7	35.4	92.7

## **Repeated Institutional Discrimination**

In what follows, institutional discrimination refers to policies and procedures of a prison rather than the actions of any one individual. When the survey was conducted it sought to assess institutional racial discrimination. For example, if a prison did not provide religious facilities or culturally-appropriate foodstuffs for certain groups of inmates while doing so for others, then this could be due to institutional racial discrimination (see Burnett and Farrell 1994 for further details). Most inmates (79%) experienced some discrimination with respect to facilities or services. Almost four in ten inmates reported being discriminated against with respect to the types of meals they could obtain, and three in ten in the way their requests and complaints were dealt with (Table 5). Almost a quarter experienced discrimination with respect to how searches were conducted or in the availability of canteen products. Note that the weighted averages reported here mask the variation between ethnic groups that produced some of the more prominent findings of the original study.

**Table 5: Prevalence of Discrimination against Inmates**

<b>Type of facility or service</b>	<b>% Inmates</b>
Meals	38.9
Requests and complaints	29.8
Searches (strip or cell)	23.8
Canteen products (food, toiletries, etc.)	23.7
Visits, letters, phonecalls	21.8
Job opportunities	20.9
Information or advice	20.9
Cell/dorm/wing allocation	14.0
Clothing and laundry	13.5
Education	11.9

Newspapers or books	10.5
Training opportunities	9.5
Association/recreation	8.5
Gym and sports	8.0
Practising religion	4.8

Information was not requested on the number of times inmates experienced each type of discrimination. However, inmates experienced an average of 3.2 types of incidents each. More than a fifth of inmates reported discrimination by five or more types (Table 6).

**Table 6: Number of Types of Discrimination**

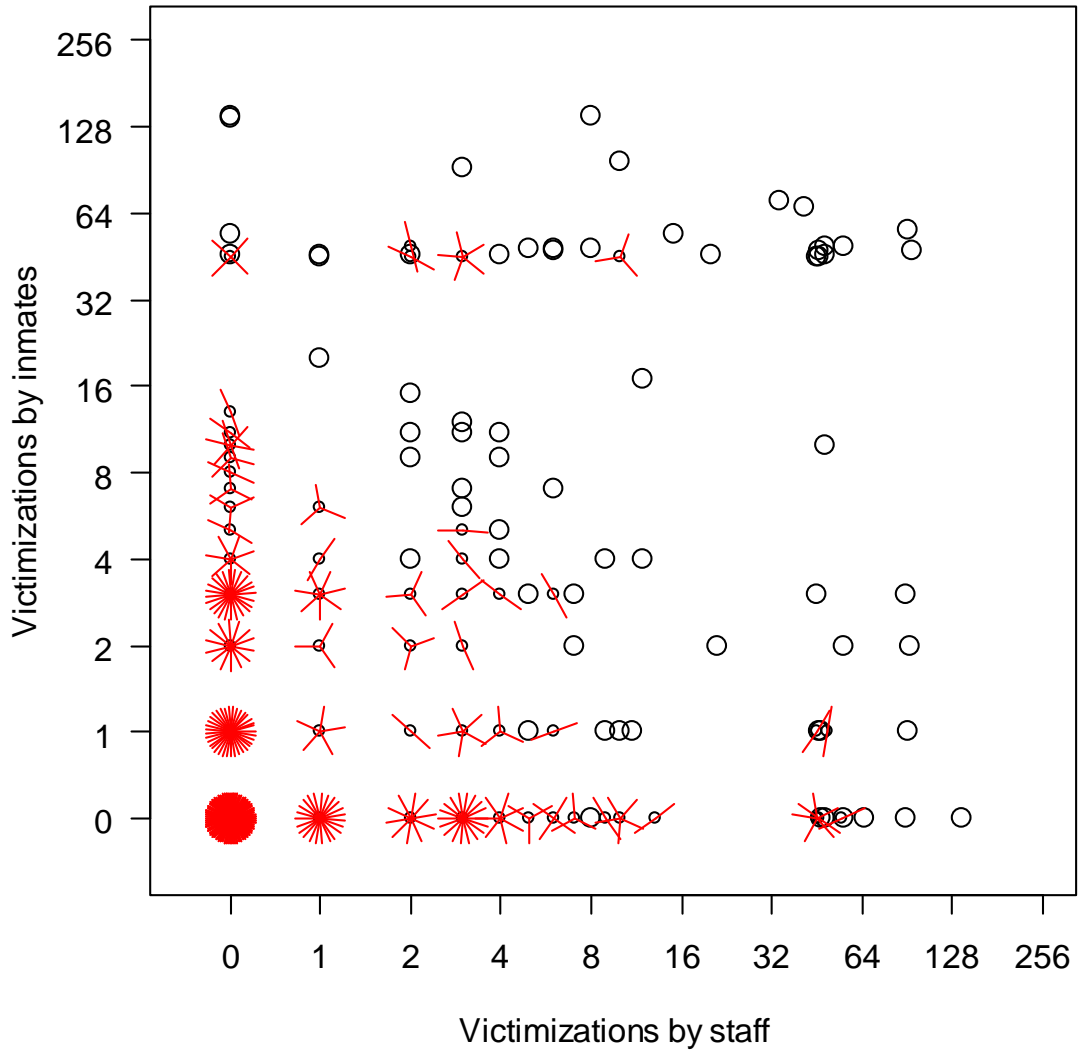
Types	% Inmates	% Types
0	20.8	0.0
1	21.5	8.5
2	13.7	10.8
3	14.4	17.1
4	8.7	13.7
5+	21.0	49.8
Total	100.0	100.0

### **Is it the Same Victims?**

A natural question arising from the previous sections is whether those inmates experiencing repeated victimization by inmates are the same individuals experiencing repeat victimization by prison staff. Put another way, is the prevalence of one source of victimization independent of other sources? The first method we employed to investigate this was a scatterplot of the extent of victimization by inmates versus victimization by staff. Exploratory analysis had revealed an extremely skewed distribution for both dimensions, so the numbers of victimizations were transformed using a base 2 logarithmic function (equivalently  $\log_2$ ). The key to interpret a  $\log_2$  transform is that

every unit change in the transformed variable corresponds to a doubling in the original value. It was also noted that many observations shared the same value, not surprising given the data are comprised of positive integers. This could cause problems in visualizing the distribution if there was a tendency for a significant overlap in symbols. To remedy this, a modified scatterplot, known as a *sunflowerplot* (Cleveland and McGill, 1984), was used. Observed points are represented by sunflowers, comprising petals (short, straight line segments) originating from a central point. The number of petals indicate the number of observations sharing those points. Multiple observation, that is those with petals, are displayed slightly smaller than single observations. Figure 1 displays the bivariate victimization distribution.

**Figure 1 – Sunflower Plot of Victimization by Inmates and Staff** (in which the number of ‘petals’ refers to the number of observations at each location)



A number of features are immediately apparent from the sunflower plot. First, there is a large number of inmates who did not report any victimization by either inmates or staff. This is represented by the intersection of the zero ordinate and zero co-ordinate<sup>1</sup>. The number of observations sharing these values is so large as to render the petals indistinguishable from each other. Second, there appear to be some inmates who suffer victimization only at the hands of other inmates. This feature can be seen by the left-most column of observations (least victimized at the bottom, most at the top). Third, there is a group of inmates who reported no victimization by fellow inmates, only by staff. These are located on the bottom row of the plot (similarly the least victimized are toward the left, chronically victimized to the right). Finally, some inmates experienced victimization by both other inmates and staff (located in the general body of the figure).

Figure 1 helps depict the victimization profile of types of individuals, but it is still far from clear whether victimization by inmates is independent of victimization by staff. If there was a direct link between the two, we could ask if victimization by inmates had a bearing on victimization by staff, and vice versa. However, the design of the survey precludes establishing temporal precedence. The aim was not to quantify future risk based on exposure, but was merely to identify whether one type of victimization status is associated with another type of victimization status. The approach adopted to pursue this further was to cross classify all respondents by three factors: inmate-on-inmate victimization (yes/no), staff-on-inmate victimization (yes/no) and discrimination (yes/no). Thus, the extent of within-incident type repeat victimization is ignored, and

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<sup>1</sup> The transformation of zero by log2 is minus infinity. This issue was avoided by adding a small positive value to all zero observations so they could be included in the plot. The magnitude of this value is immaterial.

only prevalence remains. The counts of the observations satisfying all combinations of the three factors was calculated, generating a three way contingency table (2 x 2 x 2).

When two categorical variables are cross classified, the resulting two way contingency table is usually subjected to a chi-square hypothesis test, in order to determine whether there is a dependent relationship between the two variables (equivalently, the distribution of cell frequencies is not influenced by the values of the two variables). When the dimensionality of a contingency table is greater than two, somewhat different methods are used. A log linear model (essentially a general linear model of Poisson data – i.e. count data - regressed against a set of categorical variables) was used to examine the independence structure of the contingency table.

The general hypothesis being tested was whether there is dependence between the three independent variables: inmate-on-inmate victimization, staff-on-inmate victimization and, discrimination. This is known as the mutual independence model and is equivalent in ANOVA terms of testing the main effects while ignoring interaction between variables. It is a conventional two-way hypothesis test extended to a three-way table.

The difference between the three-way observed distribution and its corresponding expected distribution under the mutual independence model was statistically large enough to reject the null hypothesis of independence across the three variables (Likelihood Ratio = 64.03, df = 4 , p << .00001).

A loglinear analysis (not presented here but available from the authors) revealed that there were a greater than expected number of two types of inmates: (a) individuals who did not report any victimization for any source; and (b) inmates who reported victimization of all three types (by other inmates, by staff and, in the form of discrimination). These two groups could be categorized as immune and ubiquitously vulnerable, respectively.

There are two possible interpretations of this outcome. Perhaps some inmates present more attractive possibilities for victimization to both other inmates and to staff (a 'flag' explanation – see Pease 1998). Alternatively, it is possible that, if an inmate was victimized by staff then this could encourage victimization by other inmates (a form of 'boost' explanation where one victimization increases the likelihood of others). Exactly how discrimination fits into the dynamics of victimization is unclear. It could be that those individuals experiencing institutional discrimination are different enough from the inmate population to create a flag mechanism. On the other hand, staff could perceive those inmates that raise grievances related to institutional discrimination as troublemakers, thereby triggering a boost mechanism in certain staff members. In turn, if inmates are victimized by staff, perhaps, in turn, other inmates believe they can victimize such inmates with impunity.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study scratches the surface of repeat victimization of prison inmates. Repeats accounted for over ninety percent of victimization experienced against inmates whether it



was committed by other inmates or by prison staff. Victims of inmates were also more likely to be victims of staff and to experience discrimination. There is clearly scope for further examination of these issues.

Preventing repeat victimization by inmates might prove difficult if the victims are unlikely to bring it to the attention of prison staff. The effect would be exaggerated for those inmates also victimized by staff. In contrast however, victimization itself presents the tangible foothold upon which crime prevention might perch, and so the particular context of prisons should not preclude some effort to prevent further victimization of prison inmates.

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