Transitions and Turning Points: Examining the Links between Child Maltreatment and Juvenile Offending

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Background to the research

- 2000 Criminological Research Council Grant
  - examining the links between child maltreatment and juvenile offending (DoF data)

- 2003 Criminological Research Council Grant
  - including police cautioning (QPS data)

- 2006-2008 Australian Research Council Linkage grant with DoC, LAQ and OESR
  - linking juvenile and adult offending
Birth Cohort Study

- 1983 and 1984 birth cohorts
- All children had left the juvenile justice system
  - turned 10 in 1993 and 1994
  - turned 17 in 2000 and 2001
- Maltreatment
  - Child protection records (DoF)
    - notifications
    - substantiations and ‘at risk’
- Offending
  - Cautioning records (QPS)
  - Juvenile Court records (DoF)
- Longitudinal design
  - Advantages
  - Disadvantages
Research Questions

• How many Queensland children born in 1983 and 1984 are maltreated and how many offend?
• Of maltreated children what proportion go on to offend?
• Of young offenders what proportion were maltreated?
• Can we predict offending from the maltreatment history?
• How many distinctive child maltreatment trajectories can be identified?
• Is there a relationship between these trajectories and offending as a juvenile?
Queensland Birth Cohorts (1983 and 1984)

- 82,100 births (52% male, 48% female)
- 100,600 17 year olds (51% male, 49% female)
- 4,500 Indigenous 17 year olds (4.4% of population)
Child Protection Records

- 9% of children born in 1983 and 1984 received at least one child protection notification (9,541)
  - 8% of non-Indigenous males
  - 9% of non-Indigenous females
  - 23% of Indigenous males
  - 25% of Indigenous females
  - max notifications was 33

- 5% of children received an outcome of substantiated or ‘at risk’ (5,849)
  - 5% of non-Indigenous males
  - 5% of non-Indigenous females
  - 16% of Indigenous males
  - 17% of Indigenous females
  - max substantiated was 18
  - 62% of notified children had at least one outcome of substantiated or at risk
**Offending Records**

- 15% of young people born in 1983 and 1984 received a police caution (14,730)
  - 20% of males
  - 10% of females

- 6% of young children born in 1983 and 1984 had at least one finalised appearance for an offence (5,235)
  - 7% of non-Indigenous males
  - 2% of non-Indigenous females
  - 39% of Indigenous males
  - 13% of Indigenous females
  - max finalised appearances was 31
  - 8% of appearances outcome not guilty

- A total of 17% of Queensland children have come to the attention of the police for offending (caution and court)
  - 24% of males
  - 11% of females
Of children who are maltreated what percentage appear in the juvenile justice system (caution or court)?

- 27% of children with substantiated maltreatment offend
  - of maltreated Indigenous males 54% offend
  - of maltreated Indigenous females 29% offend
  - of maltreated non-Indigenous males 23% offend
  - of maltreated non-Indigenous females 9% offend

- 21% children with only unsubstantiated notifications offended

- 16% children no contact with child protection system offended
Of young people who offend (caution or court) what percentage have been maltreated?

- of young people cautioned 7% have been maltreated
  - 9% girls
  - 6% boys
- of young people in court 20% have been maltreated
  - 37% indigenous girls
  - 23% Indigenous boys
  - 26% non-Indigenous girls
  - 16% non-Indigenous boys
Summary of findings

• There is a relationship between maltreatment and offending
  – maltreated children are more likely to appear in the JJ system than children for whom there is no evidence of maltreatment
  – however, the majority of maltreated children do not offend

• What is it about the maltreatment experience that increases the likelihood of offending?
Developmental or Life Course Criminology

- development of offending and antisocial behaviour
- the timing of risk factors
- developmental effects of life events

- focus on the differential impact of life experiences at different times of the developmental timeline
  - not just the presence of risk factors
  - relationship between risk and protective factors
  - life phases and transitions
Trajectory analysis

- Land and Nagin (1993) developed Semiparametric Group Based Method (SPGM) statistical technique

- Used within criminology to identify distinctive clusters of offending patterns over time
  - For example
    - Farrington et. al. (1987)
      - ‘Frequents’ and ‘Occasionals’
    - Moffitt et. al. (1993)
      - ‘Life course persistent’ and ‘adolescent-limited’ offenders

- Group together ‘similar’ trajectories of offending

- Identify offender subgroups from the data rather than imposing ex ante definitions
Research Questions

- Can we predict offending from a child’s maltreatment history?
- How many distinctive child maltreatment trajectories can be identified?
- Is there a relationship between these trajectories and offending as a juvenile?
Can we predict offending from a child’s maltreatment history?

- Yes – the maltreatment experiences of maltreated children who offend are different from those who do not offend
- Predictive factors
  - age of final maltreatment
  - number of maltreatment incidents
  - experience of neglect and physical abuse
- Not predictive factors
  - age of first maltreatment
  - experience of sexual and emotional abuse
Trajectory analysis

[Graph showing trajectory analysis with age on the x-axis and Maltreatment on the y-axis, with lines for different groups (Group 1 to Group 6).]
Early peaking groups

[Graph showing the comparison of PST-LV, ECL-AV, and PST-CV with age on the x-axis and maltreatment on the y-axis.]

PST-LV
ECL-AV
PST-CV
Early peaking groups

16.7% offend
Early peaking groups

Maltreatment

16.7% offend
20.8% offend

Age
Early peaking groups

- PST-LV
- ECL-AV
- PST-CV

- 36.0% offend
- 16.7% offend
- 20.8% offend
Late peaking groups

![Graph showing late peaking groups with lines for AL-AV, HST-LV, and HST-CV against age and maltreatment levels.](image)
Late peaking groups

34.5% offend
Late peaking groups

- 51.4% offend
- 34.5% offend
Late peaking groups

51.4% offend

65.1% offend

34.5% offend
Summary of high offending trajectories

- Adolescent limited – Acute Victimisation (65.1% offend)
  - 11% of maltreated children
  - little or no evidence of maltreatment in early years
  - females over represented
  - indigenous children under represented
    - most indigenous males offended
  - first maltreatment investigation
    - Emotional or physical
    - Notifier - family member, police or school teacher
    - Blended families
    - Perpetrator resided with the child
    - More likely to be place away from home

- High School Transition – Chronic victimisation (51% offend)
  - 4.4% of maltreated children
  - Indigenous children over represented (25%)
    - Almost all indigenous children offended
  - Maltreated in childhood but peaking at 11 years
  - First maltreatment investigation
    - Physical abuse or neglect
What does it all mean?

- Maltreated children are more likely to offend
  - if maltreated when they are older
  - if suffer chronic maltreatment
- Transitions and turning points
  - Transitions are life changing events
    - Going to school (preschool to early school age)
    - Going to high school (adolescence)
  - Turning points are when the transitions are not negotiated
- Maltreatment is a significant risk factor for not negotiating a transition
- Need to take maltreatment in adolescence and repeat maltreatment seriously
- Offending is only one negative life outcome
why does maltreatment peak at the transitions?
  – is it increased/changed surveillance?
  – family stress at transitions?

why does maltreatment in older children lead to offending?
  – more likely to come into contact with police?
  – more likely to leave/be kicked out of home?

how can we use this understanding of the impact of the transition to mitigate the effects of maltreatment?
  – school based programs?
  – early intervention programs?
  – parenting programs?