

Trends & issues

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Foreword | *It is common practice to assess the risk of family violence recidivism and the efficacy of perpetrator treatment outcomes by taking into account the offending histories of offenders. However, the relationship between the frequency of family violence offending and other types of offending has not been fully explored. This study provides a snapshot of the six year offending histories of a cohort of Tasmanian family violence perpetrators. What emerges is a clear association between the frequency of family violence incidents and a history of other offending. That is, a group of family violence perpetrators engaged in high levels of family violence offending were identified as committing a range of other types of violence, traffic offences and the breach of violence orders. The findings from this study have implications for policy and practice, including the treatment and identification of family violence perpetrators.*

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Prior offending among family violence perpetrators: A Tasmanian sample

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Research and statistics indicate that intimate partner violence (IPV) is one of the most common forms of violence in Australia (ABS 2013; Mouzos & Makkai 2004; People 2005). Approximately 17 percent of women who participated in the most recent *Personal Safety Survey* administered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics said they had been physically or sexually assaulted by a past or current partner on at least one occasion since the age of 15 and five percent of male respondents reported similarly (ABS 2013). A quarter (25%) of female respondents also indicated they had been emotionally abused by a past or current partner since turning 15 years old; 14 percent of male respondents reported the same (ABS 2013). Further, 36 percent of women who participated in the Australian component of the *International Violence against Women Survey* reported experiencing some form of violence perpetrated by an intimate partner during their lifetime (Mouzos & Makkai 2004).

Considering its prevalence and detrimental impact on victims and their families, the prevention of IPV is a strategic priority at all levels of government (see eg the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*). Yet, identifying ‘what works’ best to reduce IPV remains a challenge, particularly as researchers continue to unravel the complex web of personal, relationship, community and social factors that influence the incidence of IPV (Heise 1998; WHO & LSHTM 2010). With this developing research is a growing interest in the value of risk assessment tools, such as the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA) and the Risk Assessment Screening Tool (RAST) as a primary mechanism for identifying those at risk of reoffending and to pinpoint opportunities for intervention. Most IPV risk assessment procedures and tools involve an evaluation of the nature and extent of the perpetrator’s prior offending history (Hilton et al. 2004). In some cases, the assessments consider only the offender’s prior history of perpetrating IPV, while in others their complete history of violence, as well as other offending is taken into account.



The inclusion of prior offending information in risk assessment tools and processes is based, in part, on research that has shown that the nature and extent of prior offending 'predicts' future offending and negative treatment outcomes. For example, Klein and Tobin's (2008) 10 year prospective follow-up study of 342 male family violence offenders found that those with a prior history of violence were statistically more likely to re-abuse their partner. Similarly, Shepard's (1992) five year longitudinal study of 100 men referred to a community-based IPV treatment program found that previous convictions for non-assault crimes had a small but positive impact on recidivism. Kingsnorth's (2006) analysis of over 800 matters referred to a Domestic Violence Court operating in the United States found that offenders with a prior history of arrest for any offence were almost five times (4.7 OR) more likely than first time offenders to commit a subsequent IPV offence within the 18 month follow-up period. Finally, research conducted in Canada has demonstrated that history of non IPV-related (eg drink driving) and IPV offending are both significant predictors of reoffending among men reported to the police for IPV offences (Hilton et al. 2004).

Notwithstanding its links to reoffending, prior offending has also been linked to less favourable IPV treatment outcomes in a range of contexts (Daly & Pelowski 2000). Hamberger, Lohr and Gottlieb (2000) for example, found that even after controlling for a range of other potential explanatory factors (such as age and mental health status), program 'dropout' rates were higher for those with a history of frequent non IPV-related offending. In another study, Cadsky and colleagues (1996) found that program attrition rates were statistically higher among clients who self-reported previously engaging in violent offending outside the home, although this relationship weakened after other explanatory variables were controlled for.

Despite its apparent value, practitioners frequently do not have access to current and up-to-date information about an offender's prior criminal history (ALRC 2010). This may be for a range of

reasons but often results from privacy and confidentiality concerns that limit interagency information sharing. It is the aim of this paper to contribute to the growing evidence base that describes the prior offending histories of perpetrators of IPV by assessing data obtained from the *Safe at Home* initiative—Tasmania's integrated service response to family violence.

The ways in which IPV is defined and referred to in the legislature differs, sometimes significantly, between the Australian states and territories. Importantly, Tasmania's *Family Violence Act (2004)* refers to acts of violence perpetrated against a past or current spouse or partner as 'family violence'. To remain consistent with the relevant legislature, IPV perpetrators will hereafter be referred to as *family violence perpetrators* (FVPs).

Under the Act, any of the following types of conduct committed by a person, directly or indirectly, against that person's past or current spouse or partner is a form of family violence:

- assault (including sexual assault);
- threats, coercion, intimidation or verbal abuse;
- abduction;
- stalking;
- economic abuse (eg withholding money);
- emotional abuse or intimidation; or
- contravening an external Family Violence Order (FVO), an interim FVO, an FVO or a Police Family Violence Order.

Background

While current estimates are limited, research indicates that many FVPs have histories of apprehension, arrest and conviction for family violence and other (non-family violence-related) offences (DeMaris 1989; Klein & Tobin 2008; Olson & Stalans 2001; Saunders 1992; Shorey et al. 2012; Straus & Ramirez 2004; Ventura & Davis 2005). *Non-family violence-related offences* is a term used throughout this paper to refer to offences that do not involve the perpetration of violence against an intimate partner (current or past). This includes, but is not limited to, property offences, traffic offences, disorder offences, violent offences not

involving an intimate partner and drug-related offences.

Recent research undertaken by the NSW Bureau of Crime Research and Statistics indicated that 17–27 percent of adults who were found guilty of a family violence-related offence in a NSW Local or District Court between January 2008 and June 2009 (n=10,997) had also been convicted of an offence (not necessarily family violence related) during the preceding 10 year period (Ringland & Fitzgerald 2010).

Other research that explored the charge (rather than conviction) histories of FVPs has produced even higher estimates of other offending. Ventura and Davis (2005) analysed the arrest histories of a sample of FVPs charged in a municipal court (n=519; men=88%) and found that:

- almost half (49%) had been charged with at least one serious non-violent offence;
- approximately a quarter had been charged with a serious violent offence; and
- nine out of 10 had previously been charged with one or more non-violent offence.

The literature that explored the offending histories of FVPs participating in treatment and rehabilitation programs has described similarly high rates of other offending (DeMaris 1989; Dowd, Leisring & Rosenbaum 2005; Shepard 1992). One US-based study found that 15 percent of a sample of men referred to a community-based treatment program (n=100) had previously been convicted of a family violence offence, while almost a quarter (23%) had been arrested and convicted of a non-family violence-related offence (Shepard 1992). Further, only 10 percent of men who were convicted of a family violence offence and referred to the Gold Coast Domestic Violence Integrated Response program reported they had not engaged in other offending behaviours prior to their conviction (Day et al. 2010).

Finally, in one of only a few studies conducted in a community setting, Straus and Ramirez (2004) asked a sample of male and female university students about their offending histories (both family violence and non-family violence related) and found that of those respondents who said they had previously assaulted a dating partner, over

two-thirds (68%) also reported a history of theft, violence and/or carrying a concealed weapon offences.

It is apparent from the literature that many FVPs have a history of both family violence and non-family violence-related offending. However, the nature and extent of these offending histories may vary between groups of FVPs (Hanson et al. 1997; Saunders 1992). For example, Saunders (1992) divided a sample of men assessed for admission into an FVP treatment program into three groups:

- family-only offenders (n=86);
- generally violent offenders (n=48); and
- emotionally volatile offenders (n=31).

An examination of prior offending among the three groups identified some interesting differences. While 15 percent of the family-only and 39 percent of the generally violent offender groups had previously been arrested for drink driving offences, none of the emotionally volatile offenders reported the same. Further, fewer emotionally volatile offenders (40%) had previously been arrested for violent offending behaviours when compared with family-only (65%) and generally violent offenders (74%).

In a similar study, Hanson and colleagues (1997) divided a sample of Canadian men who were either clients of a forensic outpatient clinic or a community-based employment centre into one of three groups:

- no prior family violence offending (n=184);
- low levels of family violence offending (n=517); or

- severe family violence offending (n=296).

The analysis found that the average number of prior criminal convictions for violent offences was highest among the severe FVPs (1.8 cf 0.7–1.3). The findings from this small body of literature suggest that histories of apprehension, arrest and conviction may differ between groups of FVPs. That is, seriousness of family violence offending may be correlated with prior histories of non family-related violence.

Aim of the current study

The literature indicates that prior offending may be linked to the frequency and severity of future family violence offending and attrition or non-completion of treatment programs. Yet the evidence base is limited in a number of important ways. First, the majority of study samples have been drawn from clinical or court populations. Many FVPs may never be charged with an offence and even fewer will be referred to a treatment program. Consequently, findings generated through research using court and clinical samples may have limited application to frontline family violence practitioners and broader FVP populations.

Second, the offence categories included in previous analyses have typically been limited to non family-related violence (other violence), and property and drink driving offences. Consequently, it is currently unclear whether FVPs are being apprehended for other offending behaviours, including traffic and breach

of orders offences. Nor do previous classifications systems enable a more detailed assessment of the nature and extent of other offending, including whether there is a relationship between the frequency and severity of family violence and non-family violence offending.

To address these gaps in knowledge, the current study aimed to determine the nature and extent of prior offending (both non-family violence and family violence related) among a sample of FVPs and whether there were any relationships between family violence-related and other types of offending among this cohort.

Method

The current study involved the analysis of data extracted from the Family Violence Management System (FVMS) and official police apprehension records maintained by Tasmania Police. Consequently, the current study focused on an exclusively Tasmanian FVP sample.

Introduced as part of the *Safe at Home* reforms that were implemented in Tasmania in 2005, the FVMS is a purpose-built database that stores information on all Family Violence Incidents that are reported to Tasmania Police and result in a callout. It is important to note that Family Violence Incidents do not have to result in an arrest or charge to be included in the FVMS.

Table 1 Offence categories included in the police apprehension dataset	
Offence type	Description/examples
Other violent	Not family violence-related violence eg armed robbery
Property	eg theft from person
Drug	eg possession of illicit substances
Drink driving	
Disorder	eg disorderly conduct
Traffic	eg drive while disqualified
Breach of violence orders	eg Police Family Violence Orders
Breach of other orders	eg community service orders
Other	All other offences not covered by the preceding categories eg resist or hindering a police officer, environmental regulatory offences

Information available through the FVMS includes:

- victim and the offender demographics (eg age);
- incident characteristics (eg whether a weapon was present); and
- the police response and criminal justice outcomes (eg whether the victim/offender was removed from the family home).

The police apprehension dataset contained information on all offences for which identified persons had been apprehended by Tasmania Police. Offences included in the police apprehension dataset were categorised into nine offence types, which are described in Table 1. However, because police apprehension data have previously been criticised for overestimating offending as a result of police ‘inflating’ the ‘number of offences and charges applied to an offender...in the hope of securing a conviction on at least one of those charges’ (Payne 2006: 24), the decision was made to report on incidents of offending rather than individual offences. This involved reshaping the police apprehension dataset so that multiple offences recorded against an individual (for the same charge category),

which occurred on the same day, were amalgamated into one ‘apprehension incident’.

Data was provided in three stages:

- Stage 1—extract of all family violence incidents recorded in the FVMS for the period 1 July 2010–30 June 2011. Resulted in the identification of 1,975 unique FVPs and 2,672 Family Violence Incidents.
- Stage 2—extract of all Family Violence Incidents recorded against offenders identified through Stage 1 for the period 1 June 2005–30 June 2010. Resulted in the identification of an additional 2,212 Family Violence Incidents.
- Stage 3—extract of police apprehension records for FVPs identified through Stage 1.

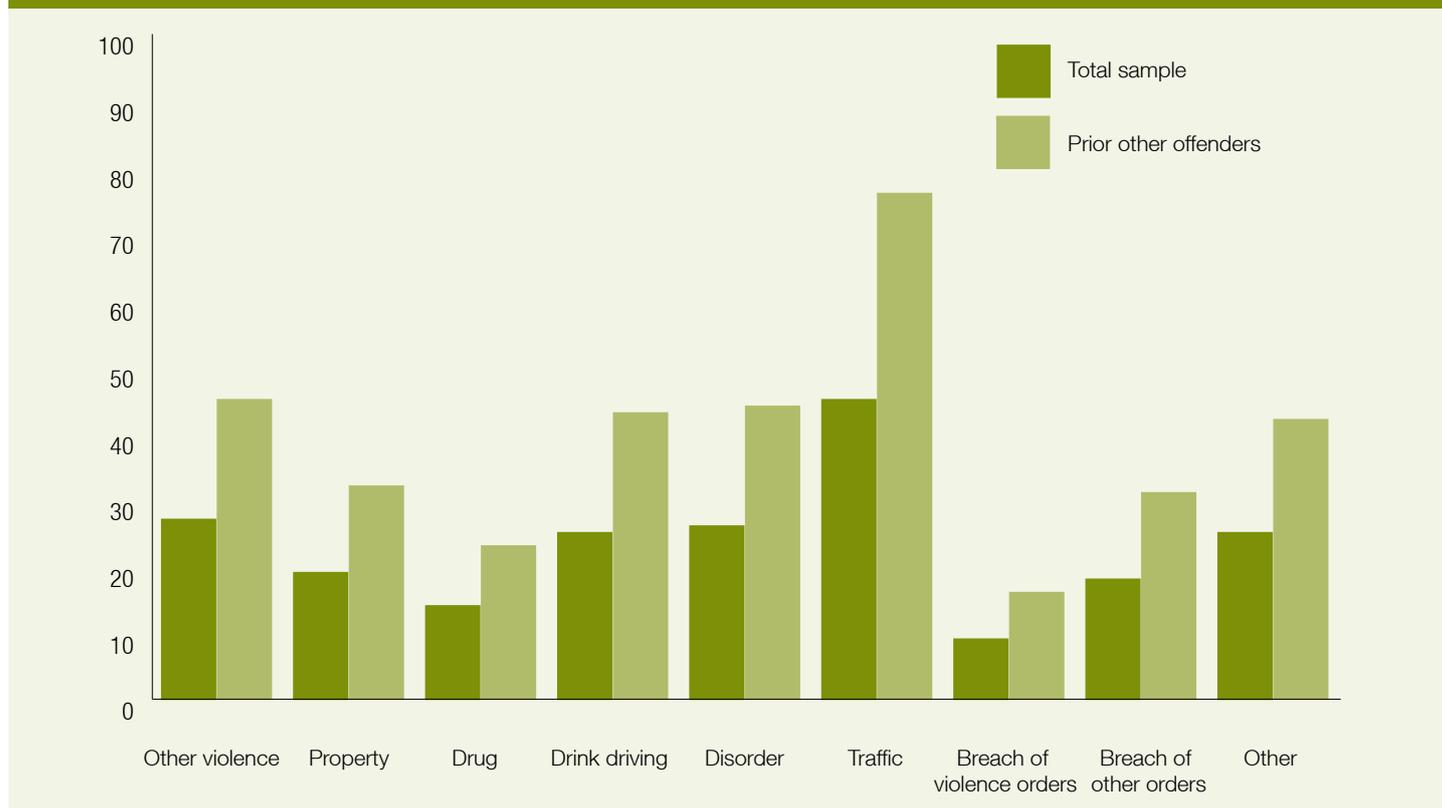
For the purpose of the analysis, Family Violence Incidents and apprehension incidents were categorised as ‘prior incidents’ if they occurred before the offender’s first Family Violence Incident record identified in Stage 1, hereafter referred to as the *index incident*. However, apprehension incidents that occurred prior to the index incident but on the same day

as an Family Violence Incident were not included in the analysis because there was no way of knowing whether the offence was part of the Family Violence Incident (eg damaging property during the course of a fight between intimate partners), or a discrete offence committed in isolation.

As cross-referencing the FVMS and police apprehension dataset for the purpose of differentiating between family violence-related and non-family violence-related offending behaviours was not possible prior to 1 June 2005 (when the FVMs was implemented), all apprehension incidents that occurred before this date were removed from the dataset using listwise deletion (n=35,866). Apprehension incidents that had no recorded date were also removed from the dataset (n=7,784) as there was no way of knowing whether the offence occurred prior to, on the same day as, or after the index incident.

The final sample comprised 1,975 unique offenders and 28,334 Family Violence Incidents and apprehension incidents. The period of offending covered by the current study was approximately six years (2005–11).

Figure 1 Apprehension incidents, by offence category (%)



Source: AIC FVMS 2010–11

Limitations

There are limitations associated with the current study that should be noted upfront. Considering that many crimes are never reported to or detected by the police, the FVMS and police apprehension data may underestimate the extent of offending perpetrated by the identified FVPs (Payne 2006). Second, as mentioned previously, apprehension incidents that had no recorded date were removed from the dataset because there was no way of identifying whether they had occurred prior to, on the same day as, or after the index incident. Analysis of the differences between incidents that had no recorded date with those that did found that traffic and breach offences were statistically less likely than other offence types to have a recorded incident date. Consequently, findings provided in relation to these two offence categories should be interpreted with caution.

Finally, accurately differentiating between non-family violence and family violence-related offending was difficult due to the lack of contextual information provided in the police apprehension dataset. In particular, information regarding the identified victim and their relationship with the offender was not available. Consequently, some apprehension incidents may have been incorrectly categorised and in turn, erroneously removed from or included in the analysis. Future studies would benefit from accessing additional information that would allow for more accurate categorisation of apprehension incidents.

Findings

Analysis of the final dataset showed that approximately two-thirds (69%, $n=1,369$) of FVPs had been reported to the police for family violence offending and/or other types of offending during the preceding six year period. These FVPs are hereafter referred to as *prior offenders*.

A larger number of FVPs had been reported to the police for non-family violence-related offences than family violence offences. Almost two out of five FVPs (39%, $n=769$) were reported to the police on at least

one prior occasion during the preceding six year period for family violence offences (hereafter referred to as *prior FVPs*). Fifty-nine percent ($n=1,166$) of the sample had been apprehended by police on at least one prior occasion for a non-family violence-related offence (hereafter referred to as *prior other offenders*). Prior other offenders were most commonly apprehended for traffic offences (76%), other violent offences (45%), disorder offences (44%) and drink driving offences (43%). Less common offence types were breach of violence orders (16%) and drug-related offences (23%; see Figure 1).

Over a quarter of the sample (29%, $n=566$) had been reported to the police for both family violence offences and other offences during the preceding six year period.

Frequency of prior offending

It was found that prior offenders were more likely to have been reported to/apprehended by police on multiple occasions than they were to be the subject of a single recorded incident. On average, prior offenders had been reported to and/or apprehended by police on 12 separate occasions within the preceding six year period.

This trend also held true for individual offence categories (see Table 2). For example, 18 percent of prior FVPs had four or more Family Violence Incidents recorded against them and another 45 percent were the subject of two or three incidents. Similarly, almost three-quarters of prior traffic offenders (71%) had been apprehended by police on more than one occasion during the preceding six year period, 40 percent of which had been apprehended by police on four or more occasions.

Apprehension histories by frequency of family violence offending

For the next stage of the analysis, the sample was divided into four groups:

- 'first-time' offenders—(no other Family Violence Incidents in the preceding 6 year period; $n=1,206$);
- low-frequency offenders (one other Family Violence Incident in the preceding 6 year period; $n=288$);
- medium-frequency offenders (2 or 3 other

Family Violence Incidents in the preceding 6 year period; $n=345$); and

- high-frequency offenders (4 or more other Family Violence Incidents in the preceding 6 year period; $n=136$).

Chi-square tests of association were conducted to examine the bivariate relationships between frequency of family violence offending and other offending. As described in Table 3, when compared with first time FVPs, medium and high-frequency FVPs were statistically more likely to have been apprehended by police on at least one occasion for:

- other violent offences ($\chi^2(3)=44.22$, $p<0.01$, Cramer's $V=0.19$);
- drug offences ($\chi^2(3)=28.84$, $p<0.01$, Cramer's $V=0.16$);
- drink driving offences ($\chi^2(3)=20.54$, $p<0.01$, Cramer's $V=0.13$);
- breach of violence order offences ($\chi^2(3)=188.88$, $p<0.01$, Cramer's $V=0.40$); or
- 'other' offences ($\chi^2(3)=48.50$, $p<0.01$, Cramer's $V=0.20$).

Medium and high-frequency FVPs were also statistically more likely to have been apprehended by police on at least one occasion for property offences ($\chi^2(3)=30.07$, $p<0.01$, Cramer's $V=0.16$) or breaching other order offences ($\chi^2(3)=93.02$, $p<0.01$, Cramer's $V=0.29$) than low-frequency and first-time FVPs. Finally, high-frequency FVPs were statistically more likely to have been apprehended by the police on at least one occasion for disorder offences ($\chi^2(3)=26.96$, $p<0.01$, Cramer's $V=0.15$) or traffic offences ($\chi^2(3)=16.23$, $p<0.01$, Cramer's $V=0.12$) than low frequency and first-time FVPs.

These findings suggest that high-frequency family violence offending was associated with a range of other offending, although as demonstrated by the Cramer's V values, the strength of these relationships were weak (Rea & Parker 1992). However, breach of non-violence orders and other offences had a moderate effect on frequency of family violence offending and breaching violence orders had a relatively strong effect.

To explore these findings in more depth, the relationships between frequency of family violence offending and frequency of other

offending was assessed. High-frequency FVPs were statistically more likely than the other offender groups to have been apprehended by police on 10 or more occasions for other offending during the preceding six year period and the strength of this relationship was 'moderate' (60% cf 21–39%; $\chi^2(3)=244.88$, $p<0.01$, Cramer's $V=0.27$). However, the relationships between frequency of family violence offending and other offending for six of the nine individual offence categories did not reach the threshold for statistical significance. In other words, high-frequency FVPs were no more likely than the other offender groups to have been apprehended by police on more than one occasion for property, drug, disorder, drink driving, other and breach of other orders offences within the preceding six year period.

The analysis did however identify correlations between frequency of family violence offending and frequency of apprehension for other violent, traffic and breach of violence

order offences. Specifically, high-frequency FVPs were statistically more likely than the other offender groups to have been apprehended for other violent offences on four or more prior occasions (27% cf 15–18%, $\chi^2(3)=13.84$, $p<0.05$, Cramer's $V=0.11$). High and medium-frequency FVPs were statistically more likely than first-time FVPs to have been arrested on four or more occasions for traffic offences (48–60% cf 34%, $\chi^2(3)=38.84$, $p<0.01$, Cramer's $V=0.15$). Finally, high-frequency FVPs were statistically more likely than medium frequency perpetrators to have been arrested for breaching violence orders on three or more occasions (37% cf 13%, $\chi^2(3)=15.60$, $p<0.05$, Cramer's $V=0.21$). However, the strength of the relationships between frequency of other violence and traffic offending with frequency of family violence offending was relatively weak, while frequency of breaching violence orders only had a moderate effect.

Discussion

Overall, it was found that:

- a larger proportion of FVPs had been reported to/apprehended by the police for other offences than family violence offences (59% cf 39%).
- the most common offences for which prior offenders were apprehended included traffic (76%), other violence (45%) and disorder (44%) offences; and
- on average, FVPs with a history of non-family violence offending had been apprehended by the police on 12 separate occasions.

Further, high-frequency FVPs were statistically more likely than other offender groups to have extensive histories of recorded contact (10 or more apprehension incidents) with the police for non-family violence offending and this relationship was moderately strong.

Table 2 Frequency of prior offending (%)

	1 prior incident	2–3 prior incidents	4+ prior incidents	Mean
Family Violence Incidents	37	45	18	2.9
Other violence	50	31	19	2.4
Property incidents	42	24	34	4.5
Drug incidents	49	34	17	2.3
Disorder incidents	49	31	20	2.4
Traffic incidents	29	31	40	4.4
Other incidents	53	31	16	2.2
	1 prior incident	2 prior incidents	3+ prior incidents	Mean
Drink driving incidents	61	25	14	1.6
Breach of violence/non-violence orders	56	20	24	2.1
Breach of other orders	39	20	40	3.7

Source: AIC FVMS 2010–11

Table 3 Apprehension incidents by frequency of prior family violence offending (%)

	First time FVP	Low frequency FVP	Medium frequency FVP	High frequency FVP
Other violent incidents	39	40	54	69
Property incidents	29	23	38	50
Drug incidents	18	20	31	36
Drink driving incidents	37	41	49	56
Disorder incidents	39	40	49	63
Traffic incidents	71	82	78	84
Breach of violence/non-violence orders	23	21	46	58
Breach of other orders	6	12	23	55
Other incidents	35	37	51	66
Average incidents	10.5	10.1	15.3	21.8

Source: AIC FVMS 2010–11

The relationship between family violence and other offending may be explained in different ways. First, the underlying causal mechanisms and risk factors that increase the likelihood that an individual will be violent towards an intimate partner may be the same as those that increase their risk of engaging in other forms of offending. For example, some FVPs may have a specific personality trait that predisposes them towards generally deviant and antisocial behaviour, including criminal offending (both family violence related and other categories of offending; Simons et al. 1995). However, research that has explored the applicability of this 'general deviance' framework to family violence offending has produced mixed results (Simons et al. 1995; Stuart et al. 2006), meaning that its relevance to the current study is unclear.

Alternatively, it is well established that a range of life events (pregnancy, infidelity, loss of a job etc) and circumstances (eg coming from a low socioeconomic area, financial hardship, long-term unemployment etc) can place stress on intimate relationships and lead to conflict. This conflict may, in turn, increase the risk of family violence occurring (Day et al. 2010; Riggs, Caulfield & Street 2000). One possible source of stress that has received relatively little attention in the family violence literature is contact with the criminal justice system. Contact with the criminal justice system can be daunting, upsetting and isolating for offenders and their families, and can impact various domains of their lives (eg an offender may lose their job or driver's license; Bricknell, Boxall & Andrevski 2014; Fielding 2013; Herman 2003). Hypothetically, apprehension incidents in and of themselves may result in the offender and/or their partner experiencing feelings of stress and anxiety, which in turn could lead to increased conflict within the relationship and increase the risk of family violence occurring. Future research would benefit from further exploring the usefulness and validity of this hypothesis.

There is also evidence that drug and alcohol abuse/dependence issues may be associated with family violence

(although whether this has a direct or mediated impact is still unclear—see Chan 2005) and other types of offending (eg property crime; Urbis Keys Young 2004). In general, information concerning offenders' use of illicit substances and alcohol was limited to whether the victim and/or offender was under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of incident and whether the offender had substance dependence issues. The available data was insufficient for a detailed analysis of the role of illicit substance and alcohol use (and other indices of disadvantage like low socioeconomic status and long-term unemployment) in the nature and frequency of offending reported for this FVP cohort. These issues will be explored in more depth in future research undertaken by the Australian Institute of Criminology.

It was also found that high-frequency FVPs were statistically more likely than other offender groups to have been apprehended by police:

- on four or more occasions for other violent offences;
- on three or more occasions for breaching violence orders offences; and
- on four or more occasions for traffic offences.

Although the strength of these relationships were only weak or moderate, these findings appear to support a body of research that suggests that one of the ways in which FVPs may be broadly categorised is as 'partner-only violent' and 'generally violent/antisocial' (Babcock, Miller & Siard 2003; Holzworth-Munroe & Stuart 1994; Saunders 1992). Unlike partner-only violent offenders, generally antisocial offenders engage in a range of violent and aggressive behaviours both within and outside the family home. They respond to stressful situations with violence, aggression and hostility, and may use violence as means of controlling others (Babcock, Miller & Siard 2003; Riggs, Caulfield & Street 2000). Consequently, it is logical to expect that this group of offenders will be apprehended by police on multiple occasions for not only family violence offences, but other violent offences and

breach of violence order offences as well.

The applicability of the generally antisocial/violent offender framework to the finding that high-frequency FVPs were more likely to be apprehended for multiple traffic offences is less clear. However, a recent publication from the Centre for Problem Oriented Policing suggests that apprehension for multiple traffic offences (eg speeding and tailgating) may be characteristic of individuals with aggressive tendencies and personalities (Laing 2010). Consequently, the detected relationship between high-frequency family violence and traffic offending may reflect the generally aggressive and hostile personality of some members of this offender group (Smart & Mann 2002).

Implications for policy and practice

The findings from this study support previous findings that FVPs are not a homogenous group. In particular, there appears to be some evidence of a 'generally antisocial/violent' FVP group who are engaging in violent behaviours both inside and outside the home on a frequent basis. There appeared to be an (albeit weak or moderate) association between offenders apprehended by police for non family-related violent offences, traffic offences, or breach of violence order offences and the identification of violent offending directed towards their intimate partners. Consequently, there may be value in professionals (eg police) who come into contact with individuals accused of these offences making additional enquiries to identify whether they are violent within the home as well. This may involve checking police records to determine whether the offender has previously come to the attention of police for family violence offences, seeking advice from other agencies and professionals involved with the family and/or completing a family violence risk assessment tool. Such an approach, if designed appropriately, may lead to earlier intervention in family violence matters not yet known to police and the criminal justice system.

Considering that these additional checks have obvious resource implications for practitioners, it may be more feasible to suggest that the patterns of offending described in this study may be used to identify FVPs at high risk of reoffending and to target risk management strategies and interventions (including treatment) at this cohort accordingly. This strategic targeting of high-risk FVPs ensures that scarce resources are being used where they may have the greatest impact at individual, familial and social levels.

Conclusion

The current study aimed to determine the nature and extent of prior offending (both non-family violence and family violence related) among a sample of Tasmanian FVPs and to identify if there were any relationships between family violence-related and other types of offending among this cohort. The analysis showed that during the preceding six year period:

- over two-thirds (69%) of the sample had been reported to/apprehended by the police on at least one prior occasion for family violence-related and/or other types of offending;
- fewer FVPs had been reported to the police for family violence-related offences (39%) than other types of offending (59%); and
- over a quarter of the sample (29%) had been reported to the police for both family violence-related and other types of offending.

High-frequency FVPs were statistically more likely than other offender groups to have been apprehended by police on multiple occasions for three types of non-family violence offending—other violence offences, traffic offences and breach of violence order offences. This lends support to suggestions that some high-frequency FVPs may be characterised by a generally aggressive and hostile personality.

This study has potential implications for the treatment and identification of FVPs. First, the findings suggest that FVPs are not a homogenous group, which in turn

indicates that the underlying causes of the violent behaviour may differ. If this holds true, treatment programs may have a differential impact on FVPs and there may be benefit in ‘matching’ FVPs with treatment programs that address the underlying causes of their offending behaviour. Further research is required to explore the impact of treatment programs on different types of FVPs in more depth.

The findings also indicate there is a higher probability that some individuals who come to the attention of police for non family-related violent behaviours are likely to be perpetrating violence against their intimate partners. Consequently, it may be beneficial if individuals who come into contact with the criminal justice system for non family-related violent offending are also routinely assessed for family violence offending.

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All URLs are correct at October 2014

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