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Victimisation and fear of crime among a sample of police detainees: Findings from the DUMA program

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Key findings

- The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) interviewed 816 detainees about their personal experience of victimisation and fear of victimisation for three crime types—physical assault, burglary and motor vehicle theft—as part of the Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) program. This is the first study of its kind in Australia to compare rates of victimisation and fear of victimisation between a sample of police detainees and the general population.
- One in three detainees (30%) had an expectation of being physically assaulted in the next 12 months, while half as many believed it was likely the house they lived in would be burgled (15%). Eight percent anticipated their motor vehicle would be stolen in the next 12 months.
- Nearly a third of detainees (30%) reported being a victim of at least one physical assault in the previous 12 months, while one in 10 (10%) reported being a victim of a burglary. Four percent reported having their motor vehicle stolen.
- Compared with the general population, police detainees were much more likely to have been a victim of all three crime types. For example, the rate of assault was six times higher among police detainees (30% versus 5%). Despite this, however, detainees have lower expectations than the general public about their risk of future victimisation.
- More than half of the detainees who reported being burgled (58%) or having their motor vehicle stolen (52%) reported their victimisation to the police. Only one in three detainees (33%) reported their experiences of assault. Common reasons for not reporting victimisation across all three offence types were that the matter was private, it was too trivial or unimportant and the police would not do anything.
- Thirteen percent of those who did not report the offence to the police were afraid of revenge or reprisal by the offender. This may be due to the high proportion of assault victims who knew their offender (62%), especially among women where nine in 10 victims knew their offender.
- As a result of their victimisation, one in 10 detainees (11%) reported that they felt they had to engage in an illegal activity as a means of compensating for the medical or other financial costs of their victimisation.

Introduction

National victimisation and social attitudes studies, such as the Australian component of the International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS) and the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA), play an important role in criminological research by providing an essential complement to the administrative records of the police, courts and departments of corrections (Davis & Dossetor 2010; Johnson 2005; Weatherburn &

Indermaur 2004). In particular, victimisation surveys sometimes show different details about the nature and extent of victimisation, especially for those crimes that are not regularly reported to the police.

Yet, like most national surveys of their kind, sampling parameters and survey design methodologies typically limit their ability to be generalised. The reliance on landline telephone interviewing or household sampling frames, for example, means that those individuals not

living in a household with a landline telephone connection are often overlooked. This includes groups such as prisoners and police detainees, despite some international evidence suggesting that these individuals may be among the most likely victims of crime (eg see Deadman & MacDonald 2001; Wittebrood & Nieuwbeerta 1999).

Further, surveys that seek to understand post-victimisation behaviour tend to focus solely on legitimate and lawful activities, such as whether the victims contacted the police, whether they lodged an insurance claim, or whether they improved the security of their home. Yet, an equally important question in a criminal justice context is whether, for some people, the personal and/or financial consequences of their victimisation are linked to their own propensity or need to offend.

In an effort to respond to these questions, the AIC, through its DUMA program, designed a set of new questions that were included as an addendum to the core questionnaire in the second quarter of 2010 (April–June). DUMA is Australia’s longest running quarterly collection of self-reported drug use and criminal offending data from alleged offenders who have been detained by the police. DUMA currently operates at a total of nine sites across the country on a rotating basis with data being collected at eight sites at any given time (eg police watch houses or stations in Bankstown, Parramatta, Kings Cross, Footscray, East Perth, Darwin, Brisbane, Southport and Adelaide).

About this study

This study examines the self-reported victimisation and fear of victimisation for three crime types—physical assault, burglary and motor vehicle theft—using data collected from 816 adult police detainees interviewed as part of the AIC’s DUMA program. Specifically, data

were collected from alleged offenders who were detained and interviewed (but not yet convicted) during the second quarter of 2010 (April–June) at any one of the following eight DUMA data collection sites—Bankstown, Parramatta, Brisbane, Southport, East Perth, Adelaide, Footscray and Darwin. For each of the three offence types, detainees were asked to indicate the number of occasions they had been a victim in the past 12 months and whether they considered it likely or very likely that they would be a victim of the offence in the next 12 months. For those who reported being victims, questions were also designed to ascertain the victim’s knowledge of their offender and their willingness to report their victimisation to the police.

To identify the extent to which police detainees reported higher or lower rates of victimisation when compared with the general population, comparative analysis was conducted using data from the Australian component of the 2004 ICVS. However, as the detainee population was predominately male and aged under 35 years, and because victimisation experiences are likely to vary by age and gender, weighting the data was necessary to ensure accurate and reliable comparisons. To this end, the ICVS data were weighted in proportion to the age and gender profile of the DUMA detainees.

There are a number of limitations that should be considered when interpreting these results. First, it is important to note that DUMA is a voluntary self-report survey of alleged offenders detained by the police and as with all self-report surveys, the quality of the data is dependent on the truthfulness and reliability of the respondents. Second, the ICVS data used for comparative analysis was collected in 2004, some six years earlier than the data collected from police detainees. Although other more recent victimisation surveys have been conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), data with sufficient

A demographic snapshot of the DUMA sample answering the fear of crime and victimisation addendum, Quarter 2, 2010

- In total, 816 adult police detainees were interviewed, of which 85 percent were male.
- The average age of the adult detainees was 31 years, ranging from 18 to 72 years.
- Almost half of the detainees (48%) reported living in premises that they either privately rented or owned in the 30 days prior to detention, while two percent of detainees reported living on the street or at no fixed address.
- Thirty-nine percent of detainees reported being employed on either a full-time or part-time basis, while 42 percent reported that they were currently unemployed.
- One in five detainees (21%) self-reported as being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- A quarter of all adult detainees (27%) had a violent charge as the most serious charge for which they had been detained.

disaggregation by age and gender to allow for detailed data weighting and analysis are not available to the public. Further, unlike ICVS, the ABS surveys do not include comparable questions on the fear or expectations of victimisation; see Sweeney and Payne (forthcoming) for further methodological information about the DUMA program.

Results

Fear of victimisation

Measuring an individual's fear of victimisation is complicated by a number of factors. Perhaps most limiting is that the concept of 'fear' is subjective and likely to be interpreted differently by different people. In victimisation surveys, therefore, fear is typically conceptualised as the expectation of victimisation rather than the actual psychological or emotional concern associated with being victimised. High levels of expectation are interpreted as synonymous with high levels of fear.

In this study, police detainees were asked how likely it was that in the next 12 months they would experience a physical assault, burglary or motor vehicle theft. The results indicated that nearly one in three (30%) detainees believed it was likely they would be physically assaulted within the next 12 months, while half as many (15%) believed it was likely that the house they lived in would be burgled. Just under one in 10 (8%) thought it was likely they would have their motor vehicle stolen.

Female detainees had higher expectations of assault than male detainees (36% versus 29%), but lower expectations of motor vehicle theft (2% versus 9%)—perhaps reflecting differences in motor vehicle ownership rather than any true difference in the perceived risk of victimisation. Finally, expectations of burglary were equal for male and female detainees (15% respectively).

Younger detainees generally had higher expectations of physical assault than older detainees. For example, those aged 18 to 25 years had higher expectations of physical assault (34%) than those aged between 26 and 35 years (29%), or those aged 36 years and over (27%). The results for burglary and motor vehicle theft were generally even across the age distribution.

For burglary only, a similar question was asked in the 2004 ICVS, providing a comparable set of data for a similarly constituted (by age and gender) generalised population sample (Johnson 2005). In a re-analysis conducted specifically for this study, it was found that 36 percent of a comparable population across Australia thought it was likely or very likely that they would be the victim of a burglary within 12 months—more than twice the number estimated for police detainees.

Prevalence of victimisation

Following questions about fear of crime, detainees were subsequently asked about their own personal experience of physical assault, burglary and motor vehicle theft in the previous 12 months. Thirty percent of detainees reported having been the victim of a physical assault, while 10 percent reported having been burgled and four percent reported having had their motor vehicle stolen.

Female detainees were more likely than males to have been the victim of physical assault (41% versus 28%), less likely to have had a motor vehicle stolen (1% versus 4%) and equally likely to have had their home burgled (11% versus 10%). Generally, the disparity between males and females in actual victimisation experiences followed patterns similar to those identified for crime expectations; that is, where female detainees had higher expectations of victimisation (eg assault), they also had higher levels of actual victimisation compared with their male counterparts.

Table 1 Comparison of ICVS and DUMA self-reported likelihood of experiencing (in the next 12 months) physical assault, burglary or motor vehicle theft, by gender and age category (%)

	Gender		Age			Total
	Male	Female	18–25 years	26–35 years	36+ years	
DUMA victims^a						
Likelihood of physical assault	29	36	34	29	27	30
Likelihood of burglary	15	15	16	16	14	15
Likelihood of motor vehicle theft	9	2	9	6	8	8
ICVS victims						
Likelihood of physical assault	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Likelihood of burglary	35	42	34	35	40	36
Likelihood of motor vehicle theft	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

a: Respondents who answered 'don't know/not applicable' were removed from the analysis

Source: AIC DUMA collection 2010 [computer file] & AIC ICVS 2004 [computer file]

Table 2 Comparison of victimisation reported in ICVS and DUMA, by gender and age category (%)

	Gender		Age			Total
	Male	Female	18–25 years	26–35 years	36+ years	
DUMA victims						
Victim of physical assault	28	41	34	29	26	30
Victim of burglary	10	11	7	11	11	10
Victim of motor vehicle theft	4	1	4	4	3	4
ICVS victims						
Victim of physical assault	6	5	5	9	5	6
Victim of burglary	4	3	4	3	3	3
Victim of motor vehicle theft	2	1	1	2	1	1

Source: AIC DUMA collection 2010 [computer file]; AIC ICVS 2004 [computer file]

One result was of particular note. In all cases except one, the expectation of future victimisation was higher than the experience of past victimisation; that is, more people feared crime than had experienced it. The one exception related to assault among female detainees, where the prevalence of actual physical victimisation was higher than their expectations of victimisation in the future (41% experienced versus 36% expected).

The experience of assault was found to be higher among younger detainees aged between 18 and 25 years (34%) than those aged between 26 and 35 years (29%) or 36 years and older (26%). Motor vehicle theft victimisation was generally consistent across the age distribution (3–4%), whereas burglary victimisation was more commonly reported by detainees aged 26 years or older (11%) compared with younger detainees aged between 18 and 25 years (7%).

Comparative analysis with the weighted sample of respondents from the 2004 ICVS showed that rates of victimisation in the general population are much lower than among police detainees. For example, police detainees in this study were six times as likely to report having been the victim of a physical assault (30% versus 5%), four times as likely to have had their motor vehicle stolen (4% versus 1%) and three times as likely to have been burgled (10% versus 3%).

Reporting victimisation

Detainees who reported having been a victim of assault, burglary, or motor vehicle theft were asked whether they had reported the most recent incident to the police and if they had not, their reason for not reporting. The results indicated that:

- One in three detainees (33%) reported their most recent assault to the police; two in three (67%) did not. Of those who did not, the majority thought that the matter was too private (23%) or too trivial (16%) to report, while one in 10 (13%) were afraid of reprisal or revenge.

- More than half of all detainees who had their motor vehicle stolen (58%) reported the most recent incident to the police. Of the 42 percent who did not, the majority thought that the matter was too trivial (25%) or private (25%) to report; 17 percent did not report the incident for fear that the offender would be punished.
- Half of the detainees who were burgled (52%) reported their most recent experience to the police; 48 percent did not. The most common reason given for not reporting a burglary was that the police would not do anything (31%), although again, it was not uncommon for detainees to state that the burglary was too trivial or private to be reported.
- For all three crime types, a sizable proportion of detainees recorded ‘other’ reasons for not reporting their most recent experience to the police. When asked to elaborate, common responses included ‘I sorted it out myself’, ‘Don’t trust the police’ and ‘I just didn’t feel like it’.

Of those detainees who were physically assaulted in the previous 12 months, a greater proportion of females than males reported their assault to the police (38% versus 31%) and older detainees aged 36 years and over were more likely than younger detainees aged 18 to 25 years to report their assault (45% versus 28%). Of those who did not report to the police, female detainees were more likely than males to indicate that the matter was too private (31% versus 21%) whereas males were more likely to indicate that the matter was too trivial to report (19% versus 3%). For victims of motor vehicle theft and burglary, the numbers were too small to provide any meaningful analysis of the reasons for not reporting by gender and age.

There were a number of similarities and differences identified when comparing these data with those from the general population sample in ICVS. In aggregate trend terms, both detainees and the general population were most likely to report the theft of their motor

	Physical assault	Burglary	Motor vehicle theft
Too trivial/unimportant	16	21	25
Private matter	23	13	25
Police could not do anything	5	10	0
Police would not do anything	13	31	8
Did not want the offender punished	6	3	17
Too confused/upset	1	3	0
Afraid of revenge	13	8	0
Other	23	13	25
Total (n)	(167)	(39)	(12)

Source: AIC DUMA collection 2010 [computer file]

vehicle and least likely to report an assault. Moreover, the reporting rate for assault was roughly equal for both the general population and police detainees (31% versus 33% respectively). However, willingness to report to the police was substantially different for property crimes with a much larger proportion of the general population reporting the most recent theft of their motor vehicle (92% versus 58%) or the most recent burglary of their home (82% versus 52%).

It is not possible to directly compare the DUMA and ICVS data when examining the reasons why victims did not report their victimisation to the police. This is because in the DUMA survey of police detainees, respondents were allowed to indicate one reason only, while in ICVS respondents were asked to nominate as many options as were applicable. Moreover, some of the response options varied between the surveys. Nevertheless, basic comparative analysis of victims of physical assault indicated that police detainees were less likely to mention the trivial nature of their victimisation as the reason for not reporting assault (16% versus 44% for the ICVS sample) but more likely to indicate that they had a fear of revenge or reprisal (13% versus 4%). Detainees who were victims of burglary were more likely to indicate that the reason for not reporting was that the police would not do anything (31% versus 10%).

Knowledge of the offender

Across the three crime types, a large number of adult detainees said they did not report their victimisation to the police as it was a private matter. This may be partly attributable to the large proportion of detainees who claimed to have known the person who committed the offence against them. For those self-reported victims of physical assault, two in three (62%) reported having known the offender. Although not as high, the proportion of burglary (40%) and motor vehicle theft victims (35%) who knew their offender was still unexpectedly high, since for these two crime types (given their low clearance rates) it is commonly assumed that victims and offenders are unknown to each other (See Table 4).

Nearly all female detainees (90%) who had been physically assaulted in the past 12 months claimed to have known their offender on the last occasion, while this was the case for only 55 percent of males who had been physically assaulted. These findings are consistent with previous research that has shown that men are more likely to be assaulted by strangers and women are more likely to be a victim of assault by someone they know, such as an intimate partner (eg see Acierno, Resnick & Kilpatrick 1997; Scott, Schafer & Greenfield 1999; Tjaden & Thoennes 2000). Female detainees who were victims of a burglary, were also

	Physical assault	Motor vehicle theft	Burglary
Gender			
Male	55	37	38
Female	90	n/a	46
Age			
18–25 years	55	42	38
26–35 years	65	30	37
36+ years	72	33	43
Overall	62	35	40

Source: AIC DUMA collection 2010 [computer file]

slightly more likely than male detainees to have known their offender (46% versus 38%).

A similar question was asked for assault victims in ICVS, with results indicating that 44 percent of the general population claimed to have known their offender, which was substantially lower than was reported by police detainees as a whole (62%). Women were again more likely than males to claim to have known their offender (59% versus 42%), although these levels were substantially lower than those reported by police detainees for both females (90%) and males (55%).

Consequences of victimisation

As a final component of the DUMA victimisation addendum, detainees were asked to indicate what actions they had taken to compensate for the financial burden (including medical expenses or lost income) resulting from their victimisation. This included a set of specific questions (with a pre-determined set of response options) about the need to borrow money from family or friends or to engage in other criminal activities such as stealing, shoplifting, buying or selling stolen goods, drug dealing, or any other crimes. The purpose of this question was to examine whether the experience of victimisation was in any way tied to a propensity or need to commit crime in much the same way as drug addiction increases the need of its users to seek alternative sources of income (often illegal income).

Overall, 17 percent of detainees who were the victims of at least one of the three crime types reported having to borrow money from their family or friends. One in 10 (11%) reported having to resort to at least one illegal source of compensation, the most common being shoplifting (8%), followed by drug dealing (5%), buying or selling stolen goods (3%), other crimes such as fraud or theft (3%) and sex work (1%).

One in three female detainees (31%) reported borrowing money from family or friends as a result of their victimisation, which was more than double that of

male detainees (14%). Further, female detainees were more than twice as likely as male detainees to have engaged in an illegal activity as a source of compensation for their victimisation (22% versus 9%).

Older detainees were more likely than younger detainees to have borrowed money from friends or family as a consequence of their victimisation (20% versus 12%), whereas younger detainees aged 18 to 25 years were slightly more likely to resort to an illegal source of compensation (13%).

As is the case with all research using self-reported crime attributions, the reliability of these results is heavily influenced by the truthfulness of the detainees (eg see Pernanen et al. 2002). Some may intentionally over-state the impact and consequences of their victimisation in an effort to disavow themselves of responsibility for their own criminal offending. Alternatively, some detainees may under-report the impact of their victimisation if it means admitting to other criminal activities not yet detected by the police. None of these methodological limitations could be examined in this study and the results should be considered within this context.

Discussion

This study examined the self-reported victimisation and fear of victimisation for a sample of 816 adult police detainees interviewed as part of the AIC's DUMA program. The analysis reveals a number of key findings with implications for policy, programs and future research.

First, a substantial proportion of alleged offenders in the criminal justice system are also victims of crime. For example, one in three police detainees had been a victim of at least one physical assault, while 15 percent had been burgled in the past 12 months. The prevalence of victimisation reported by police detainees was substantially higher than that typically reported by the general population, with physical assault being six times higher among police detainees (30%) than for a weighted sample of the general

Table 5 Detainees reported consequences of their victimisation (%)

	Borrow from family or friends	Any criminal act	Buy stolen goods	Shoplifting	Sex work	Drug dealing or other crime	Other crimes (such as theft, fraud, robbery, etc)
Gender							
Male	14	9	2	6	0	4	3
Female	31	22	8	20	4	8	4
Age							
18–25 years	12	13	4	9	2	6	3
26–35 years	19	11	1	8	0	7	6
36 years and over	20	9	5	6	0	1	0
Overall	17	11	3	8	1	5	3

Source: AIC DUMA collection 2010 [computer file]

population (5%). This disparity was even greater for female police detainees (41% versus 5%).

Second, the expectation of future victimisation among police detainees was higher than or equal to (as was the case with physical assault) the prevalence of actual victimisation in the past 12 months. For burglary, this was broadly consistent with the general population, except that the general population was substantially more likely than police detainees to fear burglary, despite having a lower prevalence of actual victimisation. This supports the findings of other research that those least likely to be victims of crime are often those most fearful of it (eg see Wittebrood & Nieuwbeerta 1999); for example, the research literature generally shows that older people are more fearful of crime but actually have a lower risk of victimisation than other segments of the population (eg see Davis & Dossetor 2010; Weatherburn & Indermaur 2004).

Third, for those police detainees who were victims of assault, it was common for the offender in the most recent incident to be known to the victim (62%), although this was substantially higher for female detainees compared with male detainees (90% versus 55%). For burglary and motor vehicle theft, more than one in three victims reported knowing the person who committed the offence against them.

Next, two out of three police detainees who were the victims of assault did not report the most recent incident to the police, although the rate of under-reporting for assault among police detainees was consistent with the general population. The most common reason for not reporting was that the matter was considered to be private or too trivial for police involvement, although a sizable number of detainees thought that the police would not, or could not, do anything about the incident. Thirteen percent of detainees cited a fear of reprisal or revenge by the offender as a reason not to report the offence. Detainees were substantially less likely than the general population to report their experience of burglary or motor vehicle theft to the police.

Finally, the financial consequences of victimisation (including potential medical costs) may place a substantial burden on some victims, irrespective of their own involvement as offenders in the criminal justice system. Although acknowledging the difficulties inherent in collecting reliable criminal attributions data, this study nevertheless showed that as many as one in 10 victims reported a need to commit crime to compensate for their victimisation, the most common being shoplifting (8%) and drug dealing (5%). Female detainees were substantially more likely than males to report committing crime as a means of compensating for their victimisation (22% versus 9%).

For policymakers and practitioners, these results reaffirm existing literature on the challenges faced by victims of crime throughout the community. More importantly, they serve as a reminder that the experience of victimisation is not evenly shared across the population, but instead concentrated among already socially isolated groups in our community. Others practitioners in the field of criminology and victimology have referred to this as the 'principle of homogeneity' — the notion that victims and offenders often share similar socio-demographic characteristics and that those people who live near or in a similar socioeconomic context to offenders are those with the greatest risk of victimisation (Hindelang, Gottfredson & Garfalo 1978; Sampson & Lauritsen 1990; Wittebrood & Nieuwbeerta 1999). This has obvious consequences for the measurement of victimisation using national instruments where methodologies under-sample such populations.

Further, while there is no data in this study to implicate victimisation as a primary cause of a person's initiation into offending, there is some evidence to suggest that for those already involved in crime, victimisation may be one of a number of important factors that influences reoffending. For criminal justice practitioners involved in the community-based supervision of offenders, knowledge of victimisation and its likely consequences could prove important in reducing recidivism and thereby improving outcomes for individual offender case management programs.

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All URLs correct at May 2011

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What is DUMA?

DUMA is Australia's only nationwide survey of drug use and criminal offending among police detainees. Funded by the Australian Government, DUMA uses a detailed self-report survey and voluntary urinalysis to provide timely data on drug use and local drug markets. DUMA is an important source of information for local and national law enforcement agencies in the development of strategic responses to new and emerging drug/crime issues.

DUMA data collection occurs every quarter at eight of the nine available sites across the country and operates on a rotating basis. The program operates as a successful partnership between the AIC and state and territory police agencies.

For more information about DUMA, or to access DUMA data and publications, please visit: http://www.aic.gov.au/about_aic/research_programs/nmp/duma.aspx or email us at: duma@aic.gov.au