

YOUNG VIOLENT OFFENDERS

A comparison of juvenile offenders convicted of
'violent' and 'non-violent' offences.

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Preface

The findings of the study described in this report were first published in a paper read at the 2nd Austral-Asian Pacific Forensic Sciences Congress, held at the University of New South Wales, 20th-23rd July, 1978. It is clearly an understatement to observe that the final report to the Criminology Research Council is long over due! However, one of the authors could hardly have anticipated how little time would be available for academic work following appointment early in 1979 to a position which attached rather greater urgency to practical affairs.

The recent completion of that assignment has meant that it has been possible for us to set about finishing our report to the Research Council. We are grateful for the Council's understanding of the circumstances which have delayed completion of the report.

Although our findings are 'negative' in the sense that we failed to uncover factors which differentiate between young 'violent' offenders and a comparison group of 'property' offenders, this may in itself be an important finding. Much of the social debate concerning the handling of violent offenders assumes that such people share specific characteristics and that these can be identified. The reality may be that the only characteristic which they share is the fact of their having committed violent crimes. The latter may form the only reasonable basis for predicting further similar occurrences.

For as long as people entertain the more 'optimistic' view that the types of criminal behaviour they most abhor are capable of reliable prediction, they may continue to support penal policies which offer the exaggerated promise of protection from such behaviour. Indeed, the belief that it is possible to corral the potentially dangerous members of society is far less frightening than the frank recognition that violence is frequently very much a function of circumstances.

Of course, there is always the possibility that more refined research methods will reveal personal, social or medical factors which are predictive of violent behaviour. Such research efforts are not only likely but should be encouraged.

Part of the present project involved the development of an inventory for assessing aggressive attitudes and behaviour in young people. Because it has not been published elsewhere and on the chance that the instrument may be of interest to other researchers working in the same field, details of the aggression scale are presented in an Appendix to this report.

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INTRODUCTION

There are few social problems which are as shrouded in myth as violent crime. It is said to be on the increase yet the only form of violence in this state for which reliable data exists (homicide) shows a one third reduction over the past twenty years (Vinson, 1977). We are cautioned to beware of sudden unprovoked attacks by strangers yet four out of five homicides and a substantial number of rape cases, involve related individuals (N.S.W. Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, 1973 December, 1974).

Against this confusing background it is often claimed that society would benefit from the early identification, treatment or isolation of violent people. For example, in debate on the future of prisons, it has sometimes been said that we must continue to incarcerate the 'violent 10 per cent' of offenders. The basic question addressed by this report is whether the claimed existence of an identifiable group of especially violent offenders is just another illustration of mythical thinking.

If all the adherents of the '10 per cent' theory have in mind is that some inmates act aggressively under the psychologically and socially abnormal conditions of imprisonment, then their argument is hardly worthy of further serious consideration. Presumably, they will regard all instances of violent behaviour by inmates as 'proof' that they should be in prison! However, something a little more significant than that seems to be implied,

namely, that (i) a distinct group of people are predisposed to violence and (ii) that it is possible to identify the members of this group. The research findings presented in this paper challenge both these assumptions. Before examining the data, it might be as well to consider briefly some of the community attitudes which form a backdrop to this issue. It is just possible that the current interest in identifying a core of violent offenders tells us more about the human quest for emotional security than it does about rational strategies of crime prevention and control.

People are fascinated by the dramatisation of violence. The actions and personalities of unexceptional offenders are often distorted to make them conform to the more dramatic stereotypes of violent criminals. Needless to say, these caricatures are occasionally reinforced by crimes which fulfill the public's worst expectations. However, the widespread preference for viewing crime as something detached from the lives of 'ordinary' people serves a number of well documented psychological needs (McIntyre, 1975). It enables individuals, for example, to contemplate from a safe psychological distance, some impulses which they are generally reluctant to accept as being part of their own natures.

While this process has received considerable attention, the fact that it also entails certain psychological hazards has scarcely been acknowledged. How can we feel secure when violence,

said to be increasing, is perpetrated by alien, unreliable people in our midst? Perhaps the thought that violent people form a distinct group and that they can be identified, affords some measure of comfort.

Previous Research

Aggressive behaviour in young offenders has been a continuing field of investigation for social researchers and criminologists in the last fifty years. Many theories have been used to guide these empirical researches (Hood and Sparks, 1970). The attempt to discover typologies of offences and offenders has been prompted by the idea that if causes of aggressive behaviour could be isolated then early intervention might help to reduce the incidence of such behaviour. A report published in 1974 (New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, August 1974) indicated that the majority of people support the idea that anticipating criminal behaviour and attempting to do something about it before it occurs is preferable to attempting to remedy such behaviour after it has become evident. This attitude is underpinned by two assumptions: (i) a distinct group of people is pre-disposed to violence, and (ii) it is possible to identify the members of this group. If it were possible to identify the special characteristics of people who engage in assaultive behaviour, then methods of prevention rather than cure could be instigated.

Research in the field of youthful aggressive behaviour has been conducted by investigators from several disciplines. Today, there are few researchers who would attempt to 'explain' aggression in terms of a single factor. Greater emphasis is now placed on multi-disciplinary studies of individuals convicted of serious assaultive offences. Hence the range of possible offender characteristics is broad enough to include individual and social factors which may help to identify the adolescent who is likely to engage in aggressive behaviour.

In the last 100 years, theories concerning criminal behaviour have proliferated and altered in focus from 'personality, to the social and cultural systems' (Wolfgang, 1978). The Lombrosian positivist theory (1870) of the 'born' criminal became obsolete when the Freudian theory of the mentally ill criminal offender gained currency. The latter theory provided the basis for the medical model of diagnosis-treatment-prognosis in the handling of criminal offenders (Wolfgang, 1978). In the case of criminal aggression, this approach presents serious problems at the level of diagnosis. The first problem is the lack of capacity to predict violent behaviour. There may be apparent reasons why violence may occur in a given individual but there is no certainty that such behaviour will occur in the future (Morris and Hawkins, 1970).

A second problem is that the individual offender's capacity to act in a dangerous manner requires also that consideration be

given to the particular physical and social environment and the situational contexts in which such behaviours are displayed, together with the probability of such factors combining to produce similar circumstances in the future. The third problem is related to prevailing societal power structures which tend to differentiate between those 'dangerous' persons with and without economic means (Shah in Sales, 1977). A fourth problem is related to 'labelling' an individual dangerous or mentally ill. The stigmatising effect of this label has been well documented (Shah in Sales, 1977; Lewis in Balla, 1976).

Dangerous behaviour can be defined as behaviour which causes physical harm to the individual himself or to other individuals (Shah, in Sales 1977). Aggression, a form of dangerous behaviour, may also be defined in two ways. First, aggression can cover the entire spectrum of assertive, intrusive and attacking behaviours. Such behaviours may be observed in animals since they are often constructive and essential for survival (Daniels, Gilula and Ochberg, 1970). When aggressive behaviour inflicts physical damage on persons or property, aggression is further defined as violence. Ilfeld (1970) has suggested that there is no constant aggressive reaction to specific stimuli in human beings and stimuli that lead to violence are varied and complex as they are exhibited both by individuals and cultures.

Ilfeld's environmental view of violence focuses on extrinsic factors contributing to aggressive behaviour but such factors may complement biological mechanisms. Ilfeld considers prior social learning to be one of the major environmental roots of violence. He notes as particularly consequential having punitive parents, learning from imitation or modelling (via mass media) and from peer groups; having inadequate or insecure male identification, acquiring excessively high achievement and self-reliant behaviour and belonging to sub-cultures which value violence highly.

Ilfeld also notes the connection between violence and frustration. The primary effect of frustration is to increase an individual's motivational or energy level, leading to more vigorous use of behaviour elicited from the individual's 'habit repertoire' by the stimulus situation. Situational factors which restrict the individual from achieving desired goals or fulfilling need expectations may produce intense and frequent frustration. Either of these factors, as well as occasions of social stress, may predispose an individual to violence.

From a psycho-dynamic point of view Solomon (1970) has differentiated between primary and secondary aggression. She argues that primary or reactive aggression refers to hostility that is proportional to a frustrating situation, while secondary aggression is evidenced in hostile, violent behaviour entirely disproportional or even unrelated to provocation. Solomon suggests that such behaviour may occur in a young male when failure to identify with a suitable

male model exists. In this case, hostile behaviour may be an attempt to establish proof of uncertain masculinity.

Megaree and Golden (1973) and Katz (1972) have identified aspects of super-ego structure which may be causally related to aggressive behaviour. For example, a weak super-ego where an impulsive nature is not checked by a weak conscience, may develop if the child's relationship with his parents is poor. Conversely, a rigid conscience may cause an undue amount of guilt so that the child seeks punishment through delinquent behaviour and its consequences. Also, both Katz (1972) and Solomon (1970) have suggested that a conscience structure with gaps in it, the "Swiss cheese ego", may be imitative of a similar gap in the parents' conscience structure.

Biological factors

In presenting a biologically oriented approach to the problem of human violence, Mark and Ervin (1970) have proposed that all human behaviour, including violence, is an expression of the functioning brain. The authors disagree with those who consider violence to be a human instinct, and instead propose self-preservation as human instinctual behaviour. Self-preservation is more often represented by 'flight' behaviour in people with undamaged brains. However, among persons with malfunctioning brains, Mark and Ervin maintain that the behaviour which occurs in threatening situations is characterised more often by 'flight'.

Mark and Ervin do not deny the existence of social, economic and environmental provocations to violence, but suggest that since the brain is the mediator of all behaviour, the investigation of violent behaviour should begin with the brain.

Mark and Ervin suggest that there are at least two causes of limbic brain dysfunction: pathological hyper-activity due to lesion or stimulation, and abnormal non-cortical (control) inputs, which are heavily dependent on learning and which can result in the incorporation of learned patterns of behaviour in the brain. In the authors' opinion the human fight-or-flight response can be modified by learning into a pattern of violent behaviour. Such patterns occur more frequently when certain basic brain mechanisms are altered by disease or injury.

Mark and Ervin have outlined several areas of brain functioning which may be altered by disease or injury. It has been found that genetic abnormalities may be related to anti-social behaviour, especially violence, and that intractable behaviour may be displayed at early ages. Citing studies of male prisoners, the authors point out that only a small percentage of violent offenders have been found to possess genetic abnormalities and that not all such abnormalities are present in violent offenders. Mark and Ervin argue that since chromosomes themselves do not directly influence actions, the disturbed behaviours of genetically abnormal males may be related to altered brain function.

In their view, the basic question is whether or not there is some structural abnormality of the brain of which such a genetic abnormality as the XYY gene structure is characteristic.

Mark and Ervin have reviewed other areas of brain malfunction including acquired brain disease or damage to the brain after it is fully formed (for example, as a result of head injury, viral infection, tumors or lack of oxygen, which may cause the individual to lose control over violent inclinations). They have also discussed functional brain disorder in which there is no apparent structural change to, or disease of, the brain, but the malfunction produces uncontrolled violent behaviour and epileptic attacks. According to Mark and Ervin, epilepsy is not a disease, it is a symptom of brain dysfunction and electrical disorganisation within the brain, marked by increases in amplitude and frequency of brain waves.

Of the various forms of epilepsy, temporal lobe epilepsy is considered the most important with respect to violent behaviour. Symptoms of this type of epilepsy are very similar to those which precede episodes of aggression and poor impulse control in some violent individuals who are not suffering from seizures. Using a stereotactic surgical procedure, Mark and Ervin have observed that violent behaviour can be initiated and halted by stimulating different points in the amygdala and hippocampus of a patient. They believe that the results support the hypothesis that episodic

violence may be a symptom of limbic brain disease. They cite cases of violent individuals in which the brain waves on the surface of the temporal lobe were normal but electrodes in the hippocampus recorded localised epileptic discharges. Mark and Ervin conclude from such findings that violent, irrational behaviour may be the only overt sign of brain disease, especially when the disease is deep in the brain, and surface recordings do not reveal any abnormality.

In the study of aggression, no less than in the study of other behavioural phenomena, there is a close link between the type of theory which evolves and the empirical data investigated. Mark and Ervin's work focused on individuals of explosive temperament. Their investigation of such cases has led them to the conclusion that in individuals with a poorly functioning brain, abnormal behaviour can be triggered by what would otherwise be considered a minimal or inappropriate environmental stimulus. Mark and Ervin propose, therefore, that re-education or other methods of social control, of those who display violent behaviour, will not work for people whose impulsive behaviour affects many aspects of their lives. Such individuals are too easily provoked by environmental stimuli and incapable of controlling their inappropriate reactions.

Williams (1969) has contrasted brain wave changes of habitual aggressives with those of prisoners with single violent episodes. Clinical features of the two groups demonstrated that those who had committed a crime of bodily violence without a background

of habitual aggressiveness were older. Nearly three-quarters had committed a crime of major violence (mostly murder or attempted murder). Two thirds had committed only this solitary offence. By contrast, nearly all the habitual aggressives had been 'in trouble' before. Over one-half of the habitual aggressives were under twenty one, a fact which accounted for the low percentage of crimes of major violence among them.

Reporting upon EEG findings, Williams found the difference between the two groups to be nearly five-fold. Among those who had committed a solitary major violent crime, the EEG's were abnormal in the same proportion as one would find in the general population. Abnormalities in the habitual aggressives were predominantly in the anterior part of the brain, especially the anterior temporal and lateral frontal areas (the areas most often involved in temporal lobe epilepsy). In two-thirds of all the cases the abnormality was bilateral. Finally, in about 80 per cent of all aggressives, habitual and single episode, the EEG abnormality was in the theta range, a rhythm known to be associated with temporal lobe dysfunction.

In summary, Williams suggests that his findings indicate that disturbance of cerebral physiology is a major factor in the etiology of pathologically persistent aggression. However, the author also suggests that since a substantial minority of habitually aggressive offenders had normal EEG records, it is important to keep in mind that the causal factors in aggressive

behaviour are multifaceted.

In recognition of the fact that aggression is not a unitary concept, Moyer (1971) has proposed the following classification of aggressive behaviours:

- predatory
- inter-male
- fear-induced
- irritable
- territorial
- maternal
- sex and related
- instrumental

Moyer believes that all of the above except instrumental aggression, have specific physiological bases. Instrumental aggression reflects man's ability to learn aggression, and to repeat such behaviour in situations similar to those in which the aggression has been learned.

Since a single model cannot do justice to all of the different types of aggression distinguished by Moyer, he has attempted to identify some of the biological mechanisms involved in producing varied patterns of aggression. His first premise is that there are in the brains of animals and man, innately organised neural systems which, when active in the presence of particular stimuli, result in destructive behaviour towards those stimuli. Thus, Moyer proposes that aggression is stimulus bound. There are also suppressor systems in the brain which are antagonistic to the aggression system. Additionally, Moyer suggests that certain hostility systems are sensitized and desensitized by blood constituents such as hormones.

In order to gain a better understanding of the roles of physiological dysfunction and neuropathological impairment as determinants of antisocial behaviour, Small (1966) gathered data on 100 offenders referred by the courts and law enforcement agencies for psychiatric evaluation. The diagnostic studies included medical histories, physical and neurological examinations, psychiatric evaluations with repeated assessments of mental status, psychological and EEG studies and routine laboratory tests. These data were combined with social histories and police records.

Final psychiatric diagnostic reports on these 100 subjects determined the presence of various disorders: sociopathic personality, schizophrenia, organic brain syndromes, mental deficiency, alcoholism, illicit drug usage and other undiagnosed psychiatric illness. One third of this group had distinct EEG abnormalities. When prisoners with abnormal EEG recordings were matched for age and race with prisoner controls with normal EEG^S, no significant differences were found in terms of the nature of the offence, psychiatric diagnosis, criminal recidivism or habitual aggressive behaviour. Nor were there any major differences with respect to data from the psychiatric, medical and social histories, alcoholism and drug addiction, psychological test results, or other items.

Further investigations by Small (1966) considered combinations of several criteria of Central Nervous System (CNS) impairment relative to other clinical data. Considered in these terms,

one-third of the sample was found to have three or more of the criteria of impairment, thus displaying strong evidence of brain damage, 23 per cent gave no indication of CNS impairment and the remainder of the sample displayed equivocal signs of impairment (with less evidence of head injury or EEG abnormalities). Using this classification of organic brain dysfunction, significant correlations were found between prisoners' classification and their age, offence, psychiatric diagnosis and past history of alcohol or drug abuse. With regard to aggressive behaviour, it was found that individuals without demonstrable evidence of brain lesions and persons with CNS disorders which had appeared later in life, accounted for the most serious crimes such as assault, murder and sexual violence. Those prisoners with equivocal evidence of brain damage were much less apt to display dangerous aggressive tendencies.

Daniels et al. (1970), have discussed a number of clinical conditions which impair neurological control of aggressive behaviour. The first is disturbance of the cerebral cortex which manifests itself in violent temper outburst, irritability and fighting. The second is encephalitis lethargica (sleeping sickness) in which months after recovery, affected children often develop impulsive, destructive behaviour, including violent attacks and self-mutilation. The third is temporal lobe epilepsy where 50 per cent of patients show irritability, impulsiveness and a low frustration threshold. Finally, the 'dyscontrol syndrome', with which Mark and Ervin (1970) associated focal brain disease of the limbic system. Daniels et al. (1970) also

suggest that the role of the hypothalamus with regard to control of aggression in man has not been fully explored. Nevertheless, it is known that in patients suffering from destructive tumors in the anterior hypothalamus, aggressiveness increases, and those patients with tumors in the posterior hypothalamus are often found to be apathetic and inactive.

Birth history

Pasamanick, Rogers and Lilienfeld (1956) investigated the relationship between complications of pregnancy and prematurity and childhood behaviour disorders. Comparing a group of children born in Baltimore after 1939 who were referred for special education with a second group of matched controls, the authors found a significantly greater incidence of pregnancy complications in the histories of the children referred because of 'behavioural problems'. They also found that the specific types of pregnancy complications which appeared to be highly associated with behaviour disorders were those non-mechanical difficulties such as toxemias and hypertensions in pregnancy. Further, it was found that premature birth (defined in terms of low birth weight) was related to later behaviour disorder.

On the basis of their findings, Pasamanick et al. postulated the existence of a 'continuum of reproductive casualty'. They claimed that behaviour disorder, particularly of a hyperactive kind, should be included as a sublethal component of the continuum

of reproductive casualty, and that the neuropsychiatric conditions of cerebral palsy, epilepsy, mental retardation and behaviour disorder should not be thought of as separate entities but rather as varying manifestations of chronic cerebral injury.

Citing Pasamanick et al's findings, West (1969) has argued that opinions differ about the meaning of the observed relationships. He has questioned whether the associations are due in whole or in part to adverse factors in the social and physical environment which increase the risk of both birth complications and behaviour disturbance. West has collected information on the obstetric histories of mothers of 393 boys in which three variables were considered - birth weight, pregnancy and confinement. Each of these variables was examined for significant correlations with measures of personality and performance obtained from teachers' ratings of conduct, from psychiatric social workers' reports of nervous symptoms, from tests of intelligence and attainment, and from psychomotor performance tests. Inspection of the large matrix of correlations showed no significant relationships in any of these respects, and no other relationships of any note.

Although West (1969) suggested a number of complicating factors which could be said to have affected his results, such as poor maternal health, social circumstances, and number of previous children, he maintained that the lack of significant difference in his study demonstrated a need for caution before accepting

that minimal birth injury is an important factor in childhood behaviour disorder.

Several other researchers have investigated the effect of prematurity on subsequent childhood behaviour. Douglas (1960) and Wolff (1967) found no significant differences between groups with regard to birth weight, prematurity and subsequent childhood behaviour disorder. Drillien (1964), seeking to control for environmental factors, compared premature infants with their siblings of normal birth weight. She applied the maladjustment guide to a series of twenty one pairs of twins, among whom one member was of low birth weight. Drillien found marked behavioural differences between the members of each pair of twins, with the low birth weight twins inferior in adjustment scores.

Concerned with the difficulties involved in establishing the congenitality of behavioural disturbance, Stott (1972) hypothesized that if congenital damage or other impairment is a factor in delinquency it would be most evident among younger delinquents. To test this hypothesis Stott recomputed figures published by L. E. Wilkins to study delinquency proneness of boys by year of birth. Stott found that boys born in 1940-41 (the worst period of the war for Britain) who committed offences between their eighth and fourteenth birthdays, were 39.3 per cent above the expected crime rate, as calculated by Wilkins for the whole age range of eight - twenty one years. Stott believed such a finding

to be consistent with the hypothesis that the greater delinquency proneness of males born in 1940-41 was due to their having suffered impairment of temperament during or before birth.

Stott further postulated that if the behavioural disturbance, of which delinquency is a feature, has a congenital origin, then disturbed delinquents would be more likely than stable youngsters to suffer ill health and other forms of impairment.

Stott collected information on 414 boys on probation during 1957 in Glasgow and 404 controls matched for age and school. He compared these two groups for behavioural disturbance (using the Bristol Social Adjustment Guides) and also for physical inadequacy. Significant differences were found between the groups in all but poor eyesight, even after allowing for alternative explanations such as inadequate living standards.

In interpreting the results of a number of similar studies, Stott suggested that the stage at which the pregnancy is disturbed may be an important factor. The cases where both physical conditions and behavioural disturbance are found are probably those in which the stress is of sufficient duration to cause impairment of both types, and where the genotypes of the mother and foetus prescribe the types of impairment in question. However, in other cases there may be physical impairment without behavioural disturbance, or vice versa. Stott concluded that if this were the case, there would be "more children suffering a congenital susceptibility

to behavioural disturbance than is shown by the proportion who were unhealthy".

Social factors

Many of the writers discussed above have investigated specific biological and psychological causes of delinquent behaviour and violent behaviour. Most of them have concluded by suggesting that social and environmental factors must also be considered in any attempt to understand the causation of aggressive delinquency. Some other investigators have examined socio-environmental factors which they consider may be implicated in delinquent behaviour. Two of these researchers are Farrington and West (1971) who have reported a study of 'normal' schoolboys in working-class areas.

Farrington and West used several scales to measure the boys' behaviour: a self-report delinquency scale which selected the group of young aggressives; a lie scale to check the correlation between the self-report scales and early delinquency; two non-verbal intelligence scales which demonstrated that both young aggressives and early delinquents were significantly over-represented among the less intelligent boys; peer-ratings, where early delinquents and young aggressives were equally and significantly over-represented among the boys rated as "gets into trouble most" and "daring", and under-represented on "honesty"; social level of the family; parental characteristics - maternal authoritarianism, maternal cruelty, passive or neglecting

mothers; parental supervision and discipline; teachers' ratings for aggressiveness indicators, and a self-image scale which reflected aggressiveness.

Farrington and West found that the similarities between early delinquents and aggressives were greater than the differences. The only differences that emerged between the two groups were related to social level and parental supervision. Early delinquents were more likely to come from a lower social level and also to have authoritarian, cruel, passive or neglectful mothers. Parental disharmony or separation were also more likely to produce early delinquency. Conversely, slackness of parental supervision and of rule enforcement were rather more important as precursors of aggression than delinquency.

Dembo (1973) has attempted to relate the values and life-style of the lower or working class to the development of youths of that class. Specifically, Dembo has studied the inter-relationship of personality and environment, and has tested the hypothesis that aggression is adjustive, motivated behaviour, related in a complex way to the youths' environments and personalities. All students from a large comprehensive school in North East England, aged twelve - fifteen years, acted as subjects. The criteria of selection were: no official delinquent record, having a minimum IQ of 80, and having heads of households of similar occupations.

Four rating scales were used to study adolescent aggression:

- (i) peer-nominated aggression scale;
- (ii) toughness orientation;
- (iii) self-concept;
- (iv) self-reported aggressive behaviour.

Background work uncovered the distinction made by the youths between "hard guys" and "non-hard guys", a distinction which closely matched the concepts of aggressive and non-aggressive behaviour types. Students were asked to rate their peers on a five-point scale on two dimensions which were shown to differentiate "hard guys":

in relationship to teachers (tends to be cheeky,
tends to break school rules);

in relationship with class-mates (stirs up fights to
preserve his name, uses his fists to get his own way).

These items related highly to each other, and were considered by Dembo to be a good test to determine aggressive and non-aggressive boys. Those youths rated as most or least aggressive were selected for further study. From an interview schedule probing the subjects' view of their environment and valued activities, emerged a factor revolving around physical prowess (labelled toughness 'TGH' orientation). Items illustrative of this factor included:

"you've got to be rough to get ahead in life",

"you've got to be tough to get on around here",

"I like to be on my own and be my own boss", and
"people my age in my neighbourhood get into fights".

The items rated for self-image included:

"I'm a hard guy",
"I like to be good with my fists",
"I like being cheeky to teachers",
"I carry a chip on my shoulder".

The self-reported behaviour scale contained eight items which referred to inter-personal aggressive behaviour (for example, fighting in school, hurting someone badly enough to require bandages or a doctor and hitting one's father).

Peer-nominated aggression and TGH orientation correlated significantly with one another and with the self-image items. The examination of youths who were 'aggressive' and 'non-aggressive' with high and low TGH scores indicated that aggressive and high TGH youths valued the display of physical prowess. Non-aggressive and low TGH oriented individuals were less concerned with affirming themselves in physically assertive ways. Dembo concluded that aggressive and non-aggressive adolescents are those with different toughness orientations who define themselves differently. They appear to incorporate selectively those features of the neighbourhood which support their own self-image. The interpretations young people make of their environment provide important insights into their attitudes and activities, and support the view that "aggression is adjustive,

motivated behaviour, related in a complex way to the youths' environment and personalities".

Interactions

As mentioned earlier in this paper, a feature of much of the work which has been undertaken in the field of aggressive behaviour in young offenders has been the concentration on the medical *or* psychological *or* social aspects of aggression.

Research experience in neighbouring fields - especially psychosomatic medicine - would encourage the view that it may be more profitable to study aggression from the point of view of the interactions between the three sub-systems of behaviour, namely, the biological, social and psychological. One recent study which illustrated the potential of this approach, was that reported in 1976 by Lewis and Balla. The authors attempted this type of investigation with juvenile offenders referred to a clinic attached to a juvenile court. The clinic provided psychiatric, neurological, psychological and social evaluation of the court referred children.

As a result of their studies, Lewis and Balla have questioned the frequent assertion that "sociopathy" is the most common disorder of delinquent children. They have called attention to the existence of psychosis, minimal brain dysfunction and psychomotor epilepsy in many of the children they have assessed. They found that psychomotor epileptic symptomatology, paranoid ideation and delinquent behaviours provided insights into the

etiology and nature of certain of the children's violent acts. They have also suggested that since children have only a small repertoire of behaviours with which they are able to express themselves, anti-social acts which appear similar may in fact be overt manifestations of quite different underlying problems.

Lewis and Balla argue that labelling delinquent behaviours as sociopathic ignores the problem and stigmatizes children who require treatment. The authors dismiss as "well meaning" those investigators who perpetuate the "myth that organic and psychotic disorders are no more prevalent in the delinquent population or criminal population than in the general population".

As well as a complete clinical assessment of court referred offenders, Lewis and Balla have investigated the parents and parental and social environments of juvenile offenders. They found that many parents of delinquents were themselves seriously psychiatrically impaired and quite a number had been psychiatrically hospitalised. Most of the children were attached to either one or both parents but the parental environment was often one of discord and turbulence, thus exacerbating the difficulties with which the child offenders attempted to cope despite their own inadequacies.

Although Lewis and Balla assessed the court referred offenders and their environments extensively and in depth, they were obliged to acknowledge that these children represented a select group. When an attempt was made to constitute a control group of non-referred offenders, Lewis and Balla were unable to proceed because

children (and their parents) who were not referred to the court clinic would not cooperate to the extent required of those who had been officially referred. As a result, their study was not able to proceed under experimental conditions.

Lewis and Balla concluded by reiterating their objection to the term "sociopath" and the limitations inherent in their report. They also suggested, however, that "what we inherit are not characters or traits, but genes, and what the genes determine are neither fixed properties, nor any one developmental state as such, but the power station for continuing processes controlling development as a whole".

PRESENT STUDY: YOUNG VIOLENT OFFENDERS.

To test the feasibility of identifying violent offenders, a comprehensive study of the medical, social and psychological characteristics of two groups of juveniles was carried out at the Minda Children's Court in Sydney. The study was conducted between mid 1975 and mid 1976. Subjects were identified with the cooperation of court officials and the Magistrates presiding over the juvenile courts. These officials were acquainted with the criteria used for including young offenders in the study but they were not involved in the data collection, nor were they familiar with the precise purpose of the study. Data was collected by two means: a number of standard psychological tests were administered by professional psychologists to children appearing before the court; additional information was obtained from the children selected for inclusion in the study and their families. In all but one instance this data was gathered by means of personal interviews between the project psychologist and subjects, the exception being the examination of each child by a neurologist attached to the adjacent Lidcombe Hospital.

The total sample comprised two separate groups, each containing fifty subjects. The first consisted of fifty consecutive cases of 'violence', involving boys between 14 and 18 years of age who had been found guilty of violent offences (essentially robbery, sexual and non-sexual assaults and homicide). To be included

in this group the offender had to be more than a technical accomplice: he was required to have played a direct assaultive part in the offence. A second comparison group comprised a random sample of boys of the same age group whose past and present offences were of the property type (essentially break, enter and steal and larceny of a motor vehicle).

In other words, by design, the comparison group excluded anyone with an established record of violence. Sampling was based on court lists, every tenth eligible subject being included in the comparison group.

In a small number of cases the boys were actually dealt with by the higher criminal courts. The Children's Court Magistrates usually referred these cases because they felt that the nature of the offence or the record of the young person excluded him from the provisions of the juvenile jurisdiction. The Judiciary extended the same excellent cooperation to the project as the Magistrates. Access to the subjects was granted only after guilt had been acknowledged or determined and the consent of the offender and his parents obtained. It was necessary to exclude two children from the study because parental consent could not be obtained. One reason for the high rate of cooperation was that the assessment process was integrated with the standard clinical services provided to the court. Parents generally felt that the more intensive investigation received by the participants in the study could only benefit the handling of their child's case.

The data.

The two groups were compared on a comprehensive range of psychological, social and medical variables (summarised in Table I): Data on a range of social background factors of possible significance to violent behaviour, were collected from administrative records and by means of interviews. These items are listed under the heading *Personal/social attributes* in Table I.

Table I - Variables included in the study.

Personal/Social Attributes.

- Country of birth - offender
- parents
- Birth order, family size
- One parent family
- Occupational status of breadwinner
- Employment/student status
- School leaving age
- Adult present when return from school/work
- School attendance record
- Intelligence assessment
- Word knowledge
- Previous criminal record
- Previously institutionalised
- Age of separation from parents

Relationship within Family.

- A. (i) parent/parent relationship
- (ii) parent/child "
- (iii) child/child "
- (iv) family solidarity
- B. Offender's perceived relationship with (i) father
- (ii) mother

Neurologic.

- IQ sub-scales
- EEG testing
- Bender-Gestalt
- Hyperactivity - raw
- weighted

Birth History.

- Pregnancy, birth history:
- Stress
- Confined to bed
- Prematurity
- Complications of labour
- Instrumental delivery

Self Image.

- A. (i) educational success
- (ii) toughness
- (iii) precocity
- B. Discrepancies between 'actual' and 'desired'

Dimensions of Personality.

- (i) unsocialised aggressive
- (ii) neurotic disturbed
- (iii) inadequate-immature
- (iv) socialised delinquent

Aggression.

- (i) 'toughness' sub-scale
- (ii) 'gentleness' "
- (iii) 'resentment' "
- (iv) verbal aggression "
- (v) 'striking back' "
- (vi) 'respect for rights' "
- (vii) 'brooding' "

Also listed under the heading of *Personal/social attributes* are two types of information gathered by means of ability tests. The first, intelligence assessment, was obtained by means of the standard tests used by the clinic attached to the courts (WISC and WAIS). The second ability, word knowledge, was assessed by means of the ACER Silent Reading Test, Form C. This test requires subjects to select a word or phrase which approximates the meaning of specified words. Thus at least one measure of academic achievement was available to complement either the WISC or WAIS indication of intellectual potential. Unfortunately, the results of a number of scholastic attainment tests (reading and arithmetic ability) could not be incorporated in the analysis because of technical limitations inherent in the newly devised tests.

Most of the remaining items listed under the heading *Personal/social attributes* require little explanation. The 'occupational status of breadwinner' was assessed using the method advocated by Congalton (1969). The status of the child's family was derived from the occupational prestige of either the mother or father, depending on which ranked higher. 'School attendance' was gauged from official records and interview data. The frequency and duration of separations from mother before the child's fifth birthday, formed the basis of the parental separation index. Previous institutionalisation referred to all instances of such living arrangements, regardless of the cause (including parental death and juvenile delinquency).

The first bracket of items listed under the heading *Relationships within family*, were based on interviews with the subjects and members of their families. Wherever possible, the home visit included an opportunity for observing interactions between members of the family unit. These observations were guided by the framework for assessing family functioning, developed by Geismar (1971). Methodology developed by this investigator provides for a three step grading of the quality of relationships within each family. General criteria, as well as those of specific relevance to the dimension of family life under consideration, have been provided by Geismar. For example, an 'inadequate' marital relationship is defined in terms of the partners not supporting their family or exerting a disturbing influence upon it. The emotional ties between the partners must be deficient (or damaging to the child's welfare) if the relationship is to be categorised as inadequate. Severe, persistent marital conflict requiring outside intervention is considered to be another indication of an 'inadequate' marital relationship. A 'marginal' relationship is defined as one in which there may be some areas of agreement between the partners but disagreement and conflict predominates. An 'adequate' marital bond is one in which the interaction between the husband and wife provides satisfaction. A consistent effort is made to handle marital conflicts.

The adequacy of the parent/child relationship was measured in terms of the presence or absence of affection, respect, support and conflict. The quality of the relationship between the children of a family was assessed in terms of the severity of

conflict (allowance was made for 'normal' bickering), the emotional ties between the children and their loyalty and pride in one another's accomplishments. Similar criteria were used in the assessment of family solidarity but were applied to the entire family unit. Hence, sense of belonging and ability to plan and work together, were among the measured indicators of degree of family solidarity.

The child's perception of his relationship with his mother and father was assessed with the aid of a series of five point arbitrary scales covering the following topics:

- (a) the interest taken by each of his parents
in the child's welfare;
- (b) the warmth of the relationship with the
parents;
- (c) ease of communication on personal matters;
- (d) the extent to which the child felt persistently
criticised by the parents; and
- (e) the overall respect which the child felt for
each of his parents.

Four different approaches were used to assess possible brain damage and these are shown under the heading *Neurologic* in Table I. First, an attempt was made to use the diagnostic potential of variations in sub-scale scores on the WISC and the WAIS. In particular, significant deviations between scores on 'digit symbol', 'similarities' and 'block design' and average performance on the remaining sub-scales, were taken as indicators of possible brain damage. For the purposes of the research, brain damage was treated as a general entity and sub-scale variations were interpreted as possible manifestations of the disorganisation of intellectual processes frequently observed in organic brain cases, irrespective of type. Underlying this approach was the realisation that the most general symptoms in organic brain impairment are disturbances in the visual-motor spheres, memory defects and a reduction of capacities involving organisation and synthetic ability.

A second measure of possible brain malfunction involved electrical recordings from the surface of the head of subjects. The undulations in the recorded electrical potentials (*brain waves*) were recorded by experienced clinical staff attached to the Lidcombe State Hospital and the resultant electroencephalograms of members of both the 'violent' and comparison groups were interpreted 'blind' by a very experienced neurologist. The records were graded either normal or abnormal (scaled dysrhythmia grade I or grade II) according to the quantity, quality and distribution of abnormal wave forms.

A test which assesses perceptual dysfunction by asking subjects to copy designs (Bender-Gestalt), provided yet another measure of possible brain impairment. Each design was inspected to determine whether or not an assessible deviation had occurred. Scores for this test are accumulated by designs, plus the scores which have to do with the test as a whole, called *Configuration Scores*, and a final raw score obtained. The raw score is then taken to the appropriate conversion table (depending on the subject's education) and a Z score obtained. Following the conservative approach recommended by Pascal and Suttell (1971), 'abnormality' was defined in terms of a Z score of 80+.

Another possible, but by no means certain indicator of brain damage is a history of hyperactivity. Over-activity, easy distractability, short attention span, impulsiveness, extreme emotional responses, perseveration, and anti-social behaviour are characteristics of a behaviour pattern variously called minimal brain damage, minimal brain dysfunction, and organic brain syndrome. The use of such terms is usually an attempt to distinguish such behavioural disturbances from 'psychogenic' or other more obvious CNS pathologies such as cerebral palsy, encephalitis, or mental retardation.

While diagnosis of minimal brain damage rests principally on the presence of the behaviour patterns mentioned above (especially hyperactivity, short attention span and variability of mood), the diagnosis is more certain when there is a history of previous cerebral disease, abnormal neurological examination or variable

psychological test performance. This emphasis on a combination of indicators characterised the approach adopted in the present study. Mothers were questioned regarding each offender's developmental history and a scale (Stephens, 1968) covering thirty-seven types of relevant behaviour (for example, childhood impulsiveness, lack of concentration and unpredictability) was used in the assessment of each case. Each individual received two scores on this scale, a raw score based on the number of items answered in the affirmative, and a rated score based on the mother's rating of the severity of the problem represented by each item on the scale.

Each mother was also questioned about those aspects of her son's *birth history* which paediatric experience indicated it was reasonable to assess after such a substantial period had elapsed. Following the observations of Pasamanick, Rogers and Lilienfeld (1956) on the behavioural problems of adolescents who had been born prematurely or whose mothers had disturbed pregnancies, particular emphasis was placed on the factors of low birth rate and pregnancy complications. Apart from their general recollections of the pregnancy, mothers were asked whether they had been admitted to hospital during that time, whether they had been advised to remain in bed during the pregnancy, and whether they had been placed on any drugs/medication during the pregnancy? They were also questioned concerning any injuries they had sustained, any shocks or other trauma they had experienced and whether the baby had been born prematurely? They were also

questioned about the course of their labour, whether or not instruments had been used during the delivery and their son's birth weight.

In exploring three aspects of *self-image* ('toughness', 'precocity' and 'educational success'), which earlier research indicated to be of importance in this field, attention was paid not only to how the offender saw himself, but also the kind of person he would like to be. Subjects were given the following instruction:

"We want to know something about the kind of person you really are. Here we would like you to tell us which of the two statements on each line best describes you."

The respondents were presented with nineteen pairs of descriptions and they were required in each case to indicate which of the phrases best described them. They were required, for example, to indicate whether they were "often disobedient" or "usually do as I am told"; "have many friends" or "have one or two friends"; "often successful" or "often a failure"; "a bit of a sissy" or "tough".

The same nineteen pairs of statements were repeated but on the second occasion subjects were asked to "think now about the kind of person you would like to be". It was then possible to identify discrepancies between current self-image and the type of person the young offenders would prefer to be.

Many of the standard personality inventories have been used in the study of delinquency. However, the work of Quay and Peterson (Quay, 1965) has focussed specifically on the development of a four-dimensional framework for studies in this field. These four *dimensions of personality* are listed in Table I. They should not be confused with 'types' of delinquents.

The first dimension 'neurotic disturbed', was assessed by true/false responses to items like "I don't think I am quite as happy as others seem to be", "People often talk about me behind my back", and "With things going as they are, its pretty hard to keep up hope of amounting to something". A second dimension 'inadequate-immature' is scored on the basis of 'true' responses to a number of items, including "When something goes wrong I usually blame myself rather than the other fellow", and "I would have been more successful if people had given me a fair chance". Two remaining dimensions 'unsocialised aggressive' and 'socialised delinquent' were assessed on the basis of responses to a number of statements describing overt aggressive behaviour and antisocial attitudes.

Finally, a new scale consisting of some seventy-nine items, was developed by the authors in an attempt to measure *aggression* in its various forms. Obviously, a number of such scales have been developed overseas but it was considered necessary to develop an instrument of relevance to local populations. The Sub-scales listed in Table I are described in detail in Appendix A. They were derived by the factor analysis of a pool of items

administered to a random sample of two hundred boys aged between 14 and 17 years, resident in 'D' (low) status suburbs of Sydney. The items were a mixture of several adopted from overseas studies and some which were generated by the researchers. The final list of items ranged from "I like to be good with my fists" (*toughness*) to "At times I feel hard done by" (*resentment*), "If somebody annoys me, I'm likely to tell him what I think of him" (*verbal aggression*), "If I have to use physical violence to defend my rights, I will" (*respect for rights*), and "I sometimes sulk when I don't get my own way" (*brooding*).

FINDINGS OF PRESENT STUDY.

(i) Personal/Social Attributes.

The most striking impression gained from the comparison of the personal/social attributes of young violent and property offenders, was the almost identical profile of the two groups. They were virtually indistinguishable on such factors as age, family size, birth order, school leaving age, word knowledge, school attendance record, school/employment status, parental composition of family, age of separation from parents, country of birth of offender and country of birth of parents. The latter comparison (Table II) serves to illustrate the overall similarity of the two groups:

Table II - Migrant Status of Parents.

	Parents born overseas			Total
	Both	Mother or Father	Neither	
Violent Offenders	11	3	36	50
Property Offenders	10	3	37	50

While the differences between the violent and property offenders were marginal in most instances, comparisons (where they were possible) between both groups and the general community revealed a number of significant differences. For example, almost two out of every five (39 percent) members of both groups were assessed as having an IQ below 90 which is more than twice the number one would normally expect in the general population. Similarly (Table III),

families in which the breadwinner was 'unskilled' were grossly over represented: there were twice the number of youths from this background than one would expect on the basis of a random sample of the Sydney population.

Table III - Occupational Status backgrounds of Offenders.

	Minda Sample (N = 100)	General Community Distribution
	%	%
A. (Professional/Managerial)	0	3.5
B. (Semi-professional/middle management)	12.0	19.0
C. (Sales, small business, clerical, trades skilled)	45.0	57.0
D. Unskilled	43.0	20.5
	-----	-----
	100.0	100.0
	-----	-----

Apart from sharing these differences from the rest of the community, were there any general attributes which distinguished the two groups of offenders from each other? There were two such factors: the first concerned the question of their supervision and the second, their criminal histories. Obviously it is difficult to devise an overall measure of parental control, but the presence of an adult at home to manage the boys after their return from school or work, may be a useful indicator. A larger proportion of the violent group (38 percent) than the property offenders were not subjected to this type of adult supervision (Table IV).

Table IV - Adult Supervision after School/Work.

	Not Supervised	Supervised	Total
Violent Offenders	19	30	49
Property Offenders	9	41	50

$$x^2 \dots p < .05$$

The general public often thinks of violent crime as representing an advanced stage in a criminal career. In fact, our group of violent offenders were nine times more likely than property offenders to have no previous criminal history ($p < .001$). For more than half (54 percent) of the 'violents' it was their first encounter with the law compared with six percent of the property group (Table V):

Table V - Previous Criminal History.

	No previous history	Previous criminal history	Total
Violent Offenders	27	23*	50
Property Offenders	3	47	50

$$x^2 \dots p < .001$$

* 23 violent offenders with previous history included:

13 with property offences only,

8 with property + violent offences,

2 with violent offences only.

How do we interpret this difference in official criminal background? Perhaps violent offenders have a penchant for crimes involving aggression, commit fewer crimes in general and are, therefore, less likely to come under official notice. Running counter to this interpretation is the fact that the members of the violent group who had been in trouble previously, had a quite varied criminal history. The offences of thirteen of the twenty three recidivists had been confined to property offences, another eight had a history of both property and violent offences and only two of the twenty six had a history of exclusively violent offences. This issue is examined in greater detail in the discussion section of the report.

If their criminal histories are not all that distinctive, could it be that the young violent offenders are no more or no less aggressive in outlook, or neurologically, medically or socially impaired than the other predominantly working class youths whose misdemeanours attract the attention of the law? Other data yielded by the study enables us to examine this possibility.

(ii) Aggression.

The violent and property offenders were compared on the seven sections of the aggression scale. All seven comparisons failed to reveal any significant differences between the two groups. There was a mild but statistically insignificant association between the offence categories and scores on 'toughness': members of the property group (26 percent) were more likely to have a 'high' score on the toughness sub-scale than violent

offenders (14 percent). As a further check on the relationship between aggressive attitudes and type of offence, a logistic regression analysis was carried out using group membership as the dependent variable and scores on the aggression sub-scales as independent predictors. This procedure (which was repeated for several other sets of variables in the study) failed to reveal any difference between the two groups.

(iii) Medical.

Indicators of possible brain dysfunction - separately and in combination - failed to reveal any differences between the violent and property groups. For example, a similar proportion of the EEG readings on members of both groups were assessed as 'normal'

(Table VI):

Table VI - Neurologic Assessment (Electroencephalograph).

	<u>Normal</u>	<u>Grade I Dysrhythmia</u>	<u>Grade II Dysrhythmia</u>	<u>Total</u>
Violent Offenders	37	9	3	49
Property Offenders	34	11	4	49

There were no significant differences in the IQ sub-scale scores or the number of people classified as normal, minimal damage, or abnormal on the Bender-Gestalt test. Nor were there significant differences in the degree of childhood hyperactivity although a greater proportion (88 percent) of the violent group had 'low/moderate' hyperactivity scores compared with the property group

(73 percent).

(iv) Birth History.

The birth history data was both credible and internally consistent. Given the status background of the families involved, the fact that 12.5 percent of the boys had been born prematurely (either in terms of gestational age or low birth weight) accords with the findings of other research (Vinson and Stevens, 1977).

Mothers who reported having had complicated pregnancies, also tended to report the occurrence of stress, premature births and instrumental deliveries. Despite this reassuring evidence, there was no item of birth history on which the two groups differed significantly.

(v) Relationships Within Family.

Despite the care taken in assessing and rating four aspects of family functioning, there was only one dimension (*family solidarity*) on which the differences between the two groups approached statistical significance (Table VII). Approximately three out of five of the violent offenders compared with two out of five of the property group came from homes in which the 'solidarity' or cohesion of the family unit was assessed as 'adequate'. This difference fell just short of statistical significance:

Table VII - Family Solidarity.

	Adequate (4-7 Geismar scale*)	Inadequate (1-3 Geismar scale*)	Total
Violent Offenders	29	20	49
Property Offenders	20	30	50

*Geismar, L.L. (1971) op. cit.

The relationship between the family ratings and the offence categories was further examined by means of logistic regression analysis. Using the set of scores on family functioning (neglecting some high order interactions) and a logistic model, no differences could be observed between the two groups.

In addition to the above family assessments (which were based on interviews and home visits), each boy was required to rate his closeness to, and liking for his parents, on a set of five arbitrary scales. No difference existed between the two groups with respect to their rating of mothers but a significant ($P < .05$) difference existed with respect to fathers. Four out of five members of the violent group compared with three out of five property offenders expressed 'satisfaction' with their paternal relationship:

Table VIII - Relationship with Father.

	<u>'Satisfactory'</u> (above mid-point of range)	<u>'Unsatisfactory'</u> (mid-point and below on range)	Total
Violent Offenders	37	9	46
Property Offenders	29	19	48

$\chi^2 \dots p < .05$

(vi) Dimensions of Personality.

Of the four dimensions considered in the study, *unsocialised aggressive* was the one most directly concerned with assaultive, quarrelsome behaviour. However, the violent and property offenders had virtually identical results on this and two of the other subscales (*inadequate-immature* and *socialised delinquent*). The only dimension on which the two groups differed was *neurotic disturbed*: almost twice as many (38 percent) of the violent group as the property offenders (20 percent) obtained a 'low' score on this section of the inventory. However, the overall differences were not significant.

(vii) Self Image.

When self image was considered in terms of *educational success*, *toughness* and *precocity*, no differences were observed between the violent and property offenders. When discrepancies between actual and desired behaviour were considered, the only apparently

significant difference to emerge was that property offenders aspired to be more 'precocious' than the violent offenders. However, logistic regression analysis of the self image data failed to uncover any significant differences between the two groups.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.

The point of departure for the presentation of the Minda findings was the concept of a 'violent 10 percent' among offenders. The usefulness of this notion appears to rest on two assumptions:

(a) the existence of a distinct group of people predisposed to violence, and (b) that it is possible to identify the members of this group.

Distinct criminal histories?

In the course of our analysis the offence histories of the 'violent' group were compared with a second 'property' group, from which we had deliberately excluded boys with a history of aggressive offences. Presumably, members of the latter group would be unlikely to qualify for inclusion in the 'violent 10 percent'. Yet the most distinctive features of the criminal histories of the violent group were found to be (i) that a significantly greater number of them had no previous convictions, and (ii) that where previous offences had occurred, it was rare (2 cases out of 50) for them to be of an exclusively violent kind. The greater likelihood was a mixture of both property and violent offences.

While the method of selecting members of the comparison group served other purposes, their backgrounds tell us little about the heterogeneity of offences committed by a 'typical' offender. It

would really be more instructive to look at the behaviour of a sample of young men in the community from the point of view of whether their misdemeanours (detected or undetected by the authorities) are generally of an aggressive or non-aggressive kind. Fortunately such data has been collected as part of a study of crime and social problems in Newcastle, conducted by one of the authors (T.V.) and a colleague, Ross Homel.

Because of the time and effort required to obtain relatively honest data on self-disclosed crime, the sample is comparatively small - 109 boys between fifteen and seventeen years of age, drawn from 'high', 'medium' and 'low risk' areas of the city.*

The analysis is still incomplete but for the present purposes it is possible to compare the self-disclosed incidence of aggression ("alone or with someone else belted somebody up") and other types of misdemeanours (not involving personal violence). Very few of the young people failed to report at least one misdemeanour (Table IX). Equally compelling, however, was the fact that only one of those interviewed had committed an aggressive act and no other type of misconduct. Just as had been observed with the sample of violent offenders at Minda, self-disclosed aggression was interwoven with several other types of offences:

* Risk determined on the basis of medical and social problems (Vinson and Homel, 1975).

Table IX - Self-disclosed delinquency.

	Low Risk Areas N = 34	Medium Risk Areas N = 47	High Risk Areas N = 28
Aggression only	1	-	-
Aggression + property	4	15	5
Property only	26	29	21
None	3	3	2

In the light of these community observations, how should we interpret the mixture of aggressive and property offences in the histories of our Minda sample of violent offenders? Some years ago McClintock and Gibson (1961) noted a similar trend among men convicted of robbery offences. The investigators offered a partial explanation which would appear to have relevance to the present study: "It might be that the conditions of criminal life are such that any persistent offender is liable to resort to violence at some time, and that if a man received enough convictions he will get one for violence sooner or later..." McClintock and Gibson tested this hypothesis statistically by examining whether convictions for violence were randomly distributed among convictions generally. They concluded that there is a likelihood that any offender may resort to a single act of violence if he persists in a criminal career long enough.

This type of reasoning is at least consistent with the fact that eight members of the violent group had criminal histories which included both aggressive and property offences. What it does not

help explain is the fact that slightly more than half of the violent group had no previous convictions of any kind.

We know from the Newcastle data that comparatively serious aggression does not occur in isolation of other types of misdemeanours. The fact that a violent offence is so often the first step in an 'official' criminal career probably tells us more about the Australian community's intolerance of this type of offence than it does about the past behaviour of the culprit. While many people might be reluctant to report a young man for a property offence, they are likely to be less diffident about reporting aggressive acts. The public's attitude towards assaultive type offences is reflected in the comparatively severe penalties they wish to see imposed on those who perpetrate such crimes (N.S.W. Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, August, 1974). The same attitude probably also helps to explain why there is less of a discrepancy between the reported and unreported rates for violent crimes than is the case with property offences (N.S.W. Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Unreported Crime, 1974). Thus the official records of members of the violent group may understate the full extent of their involvement in property crime.

There are two major alternatives to this interpretation:

- (i) *the official record accurately states the position* - more than half of the violent group have not committed previous offences. Such a view runs counter to the self-disclosed delinquency data, but if it is correct then their solitary offences hardly represent support

for the 'violent 10 percent' theory;

- (ii) first offenders in the violent group have only committed offences of an essentially aggressive kind. This view accords neither with the pattern of self-disclosed delinquency or what we could expect in the way of public tolerance of repeated aggressive offences.

Hence, the present study provides little support for the view that young offenders before the courts for aggressive offences have distinctly violent criminal histories.

Distinct personalities or backgrounds?

With the exception of two factors (parental supervision and relationship with father), the present study has failed to reveal any significant differences between the violent and property offenders. The range of tests used was quite comprehensive and they were selected on the basis of current theory and research. Nevertheless, a study of this kind inevitably involves a number of possible limitations:

- (i) the imperfect nature of our instruments may have caused us to overlook genuine differences between the groups;
- (ii) we might have done better in our choice of instruments.

Against these possibilities must be weighted the fairly compelling evidence that after a comparison on almost fifty items, significant differences were observed on only two variables. While both these factors deserve closer scrutiny, there is a high probability that

this number of differences could occur on the basis of chance. Moreover, the two variables involved, while of potential relevance to our understanding of the etiology of aggression, hardly constitute a basis for identifying violent personalities. In this regard the measures which really mattered were those used to detect impaired neurologic, personal or social functioning. They failed to reveal any differences between the violent and property groups.

It could, of course, be argued that our subjects are still youthful, that their violent behaviour may increase with greater physical strength and maturity. This point must be conceded and an attempt will be made to follow-up the records of members of both groups in the study. Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the degree to which the attitudinal and social aspects of personality - to say nothing of its neurologic and physical bases - were already well established in a group whose average age was 16.5 years.

The general pattern of our findings is clear: little evidence has been uncovered of criminal or background features which distinguish violent from non-violent offenders. Regardless of their current convictions, there are grounds for regarding both groups as having been drawn from essentially the same population.

Despite this general conclusion and the difficulties it poses for adherents of the 'violent 10 percent' theory, it could be of value to study the future outcome of those Minda cases which involved a history of repeated violence.

Indeed, the ten offenders in this category included several cases where, with hindsight, one could detect a combination of factors 'predictive' of violence. For example, the lad of seventeen with the worst record of violence - three previous convictions - had a normal EEG result but was adjudged 'severely abnormal' on the Bender-Gestalt. He obtained high scores on the Toughness and Verbal Aggression sub-scales, had a history of institutional care and came from a family rated 'inadequate' on the family solidarity scale. However, with the possible exception of the Bender-Gestalt test on which 5 of the 10 violent recidivists obtained marginal or abnormal scores, results on the other tests were generally scattered.

That a relatively small number of young offenders have repeated violent offences is undeniable and the Law probably has little choice in the way it can deal with members of this group. However, whatever small consolation the notion of a 'violent 10 percent' affords the general public, there appears to be little basis for believing that such a psychologically distinct group exists or that they have a monopoly on violent behaviour in the community. Similar rates of self-disclosed aggression were found at both

social extremes of the 'unconvicted' group studied in Newcastle, yet all ten Minda offenders apprehended for multiple violent crimes came from unskilled or semi-skilled backgrounds. Perhaps this is a comment on the greater likelihood of some people's misdemeanours being detected and implies the need for a less individualistic and in many ways less comforting perspective on violence.

T. Vinson.

W. Hemphill.

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APPENDIX A: Hostility/Aggression Inventory

The inventory contains seventy-nine items. Respondents are asked to indicate their feelings about each of these statements with the aid of a scale which ranges from "agree strongly" to "disagree strongly". The factor analysis of results obtained from a sample of two hundred boys aged between 14 and 17 years resulted in the isolation of seven factors:

- (i) Toughness
- (ii) Gentleness
- (iii) Resentment
- (iv) Verbal aggression
- (v) Striking back
- (vi) Respect for rights
- (vii) Brooding/non-verbal aggression

Because the hostility/aggression inventory was developed specifically for the purposes of the present study, a copy of the instrument is included in this Appendix together with the factor loading of items for each of the sub-scales.

THE INSTRUMENT

Below are a number of statements about the way you may feel or act from time to time or in certain situations. We would like to know how well you feel each statement describes you as a person.

Please answer how you feel about each of the statements by ticking the one box on each line which seems right for you. Do not think about each item too long. Your first thoughts are what we are interested in.

Try to give a definite answer. If you are undecided about too many statements we will not get a picture of what you think.

Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. We are only interested in what you may think and feel, and how you may act on different occasions.

Suburb _____ I.D. No. <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I seldom strike back, even if someone hits me first.					
2. I demand that people respect my rights.					
3. I like to swear.					
4. If someone doesn't treat me right, I don't let it annoy me.					
5. Sometimes people bother me just by being around.					

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
6. Even when I'm angry I don't use 'strong language'.					
7. When I don't like my friends' behaviour I let them know it.					
8. I sometimes show my anger by banging on the table.					
9. I'm a tough sort of bloke.					
10. I am always patient with others.					
11. Although I don't show it, I am sometimes eaten up with jealousy.					
12. When people are bossy, I take my time just to annoy them.					
13. Where I come from you've got to be tough to get on.					
14. If I let people see the way I feel I'd be considered a hard person to get along with.					
15. Whoever insults me or my family is asking for a fight.					
16. I begin to fight when others try to get me to do something I don't want to.					

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
17. I like to be with tough guys.					
18. I don't often feel that people are trying to make me mad or insult me.					
19. Failure gives me a feeling of remorse.					
20. When I get mad, I say nasty things.					
21. If someone doesn't treat me right I fight back.					
22. I sometimes sulk when I don't get my own way.					
23. I am a pretty good fighter.					
24. My neighbourhood is a peaceful place for adults to live in.					
25. I sometimes carry a chip on my shoulder.					
26. I often make threats I don't really mean to carry out.					
27. I like to do forbidden things.					
28. I do many things that I later regret.					
29. If somebody hits me first, I let him have it.					

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
30. When I'm outside, I like to be on my own and be my own boss.					
31. Where I come from it is important to be the person in the group who is best with the birds.					
32. I don't let a lot of unimportant things irritate me.					
33. I am good at sports.					
34. When people yell at me, I yell back.					
35. I often wonder when someone does something nice for me if there aren't strings attached.					
36. Even if he needed it, I could not put someone in his place.					
37. I get angry and smash things.					
38. I can think of no good reason for ever hitting anyone.					
39. My motto is 'never trust strangers'.					
40. I often feel like a powder keg about to explode.					

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
41. If somebody annoys me, I'm likely to tell him what I think of him.					
42. I like to be good with my fists.					
43. When I look back on what's happened to me, I can't help feeling a bit annoyed.					
44. People who continually pester you are asking for a punch in the nose.					
45. Unless somebody asks me in a nice way, I won't do what they want.					
46. You've got to be rough to get ahead in life.					
47. I don't know any people I definitely hate.					
48. There are a number of people who seem to dislike me very much.					
49. I would rather give in about something than get into an argument over it.					
50. I have known people who pushed me so far that we came to blows.					
51. When I am mad I sometimes slam doors.					

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
52. Almost every week I see someone I don't like.					
53. When I'm home my parents don't take much interest in me.					
54. At times I feel hard done by.					
55. I can't help getting into arguments when people disagree with me.					
56. There are a number of people who seem to be jealous of me.					
57. I sometimes have a feeling that others are laughing at me.					
58. It is important to be good at some form of sport.					
59. I sometimes have thoughts which make me feel ashamed.					
60. Tough guys are good blokes to be with.					
61. I generally don't let anyone know even when I have a poor opinion of them.					
62. Lately, I've been rather bad tempered.					
63. I never play practical jokes.					

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
64. When someone is bossy, I do the opposite of what he asks.					
65. I sometimes spread rumours about people I don't like.					
66. I am a gentle person.					
67. I often feel that I have not lived the right kind of life.					
68. When someone makes a rule, I don't like I am tempted to break it.					
69. I am usually disobedient.					
70. If I have to use physical violence to defend my rights, I will.					
71. I am a bit of a bully.					
72. I have no enemies who really wish to harm me.					
73. It depresses me that I didn't do more for my parents.					
74. When arguing I tend to raise my voice.					
75. It makes my blood boil to have somebody make fun of me.					
76. Ocasionally when I am mad at someone I will give him the 'silent treatment'.					

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
77. I like to act 'big'.					
78. I am irritated a great deal more than people realise.					
79. I used to think that most people told the truth but now I know otherwise.					

FACTOR LOADINGS

FACTOR I - TOUGHNESS: HOW I SEE MYSELF AND MY ENVIRONMENT

<u>Factor Loading</u>	<u>Item No.</u>	
.710	9	I'm a tough sort of bloke.
.637	17	I like to be with tough guys.
.609	31	Where I come from it is important to be the person in the group who is best with the birds.
.609	46	You've got to be rough to get ahead in life.
.572	60	Tough guys are good blokes to be with.
.546	71	I am a bit of a bully.
.532	13	Where I come from you've got to be tough to get on.
.529	42	I like to be good with my fists.
.518	69	I am usually disobedient.
.493	56	There are a number of people who seem to be jealous of me.
.491	27	I like to do forbidden things.
.472	77	I like to act 'big'.
.466	65	I sometimes spread rumours about people I don't like.
.463	52	Almost every week I see someone I don't like.
.453	37	I get angry and smash things.
.447	23	I am a pretty good fighter.
.398	3	I like to swear.

FACTOR II - GENTLENESS: HOW I SEE MYSELF AND MY ENVIRONMENT

<u>Factor Loading</u>	<u>Item No.</u>	
.566	4	If someone doesn't treat me right I don't let it annoy me.
.525	18	I don't often feel that people are trying to make me mad or insult me.
.504	32	I don't let a lot of unimportant things irritate me.
.477	47	I don't know any people I definitely hate.
.461	61	I generally don't let anyone know, even when I have a poor opinion of them.
.456	72	I have no enemies who really wish to harm me.
.419	66	I am a gentle person.
-.396	53	When I'm home my parents don't take much interest in me.
.349	38	I can think of no good reason for ever hitting anyone.
.349	24	My neighbourhood is a peaceful place for adults to live in.
.312	10	I am always patient with others.

FACTOR III - RESENTMENT

<u>Factor Loading</u>	<u>Item No.</u>	
.577	11	Although I don't show it, I am sometimes eaten up with jealousy.
.572	25	I sometimes carry a chip on my shoulder.
.559	40	I often feel like a powder keg about to explode.
.548	54	At times I feel hard done by.
.547	67	I often feel I have not lived the right kind of life.
.501	78	I am irritated a great deal more than people realise.
-.404	28	I do many things that later I regret.
.395	57	I sometimes have a feeling that others are laughing at me.
-.392	43	When I look back on what's happened to me, I can't help feeling a bit annoyed.
.392	14	If I let people see the way I feel, I'd be considered a hard person to get along with.
.389	73	It depresses me that I did not do more for my parents.
.383	62	Lately I've been rather bad tempered.
.381	48	There are a number of people who seem to dislike me very much.
-.375	33	I am good at sports.
.363	19	Failure gives me a feeling of remorse.
.331	5	Sometimes people bother me just by being around.

FACTOR IV - VERBAL AGGRESSION

<u>Factor Loading</u>	<u>Item No.</u>	
-.552	6	Even when I am angry I don't use 'strong language'.
.498	20	When I get mad I say nasty things.
.465	34	When people yell at me I yell back.
-.450	49	I would rather give in about something than get into an argument over it.
-.449	63	I never play practical jokes.
.391	74	When arguing, I tend to raise my voice.
.375	68	When someone makes a rule I don't like I am tempted to break it.
.363	55	I can't help getting into arguments when people disagree with me.
.357	41	If somebody annoys me, I'm likely to tell him what I think of him.
.334	26	I often make threats I don't really mean to carry out.
.332	12	When people are bossy, I take my time just to annoy them.

FACTOR V - STRIKING BACK

<u>Factor Loading</u>	<u>Item No.</u>	
.590	15	Whoever insults me or my family is asking for a fight.
.506	29	If somebody hits me first I let him have it.
.498	44	People who continually pester you are asking for a punch in the nose.
.471	58	It is important to be good at some form of sports.
.435	70	If I have to use physical violence to defend my rights, I will.
.432	79	I used to think that most people told the truth but now I know otherwise.
.400	39	My motto is 'never trust strangers'.
.392	75	It makes my blood boil to have someone make fun of me.
.381	64	When someone is bossy, I do the opposite of what he asks.
.375	50	I have known people who pushed me so far we came to blows.
-.353	1	I seldom strike back, even if someone hits me first.
.351	35	I often wonder when someone does something nice for me if there aren't strings attached.
.336	21	If someone doesn't treat me right I fight back.
.332	7	When I don't like my friends' behaviour I let them know it.

FACTOR VI - RESPECT FOR RIGHTS

<u>Factor Loading</u>	<u>Item No.</u>	
.519	2	I demand that people respect my rights.
.500	30	When I'm outside, I like to be on my own and be my own boss.
.417	45	Unless somebody asks me in a nice way, I won't do what they want.
.342	16	I begin to fight when others try to get me to do something I don't want to.

FACTOR VII - BROODING/NON-VERBAL HOSTILITY

<u>Factor Loading</u>	<u>Item No.</u>	
.524	22	I sometimes sulk when I don't get my own way.
.479	51	When I am mad I sometimes slam doors.
.431	76	Occasionally when I am mad at someone I will give him the 'silent treatment'.
.382	59	I sometimes have thoughts which make me feel ashamed.
.350	36	Even if he needed it, I could not put someone in his place.
.331	8	I sometimes show my anger by banging on the table.