

# Repeat Offenders

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# Outline

1. Repeat offending patterns
2. Repeat offending and other patterns
3. Approaches to reducing repeat offending
4. Deciding on repeat offending measures

# Repeat offending patterns

- a) Measurement is tricky
- b) Dishonesty is widespread
- c) Most crime is committed by a small minority
- d) Crime is mostly masculine and mostly committed by the young
- e) There are different types of repeat offender

# Measurement is tricks

- Self report studies are used, because
  - only a minority of crime is reported and of that reported only a minority is detected, and because of weaknesses in recording
- Criminal justice data – detected, charged, convicted, are used because of
  - Cost, possible memory failures, and risk of lying in self-report studies and because of breadth of coverage of CJ data
- The broad conclusions are the same

## b) Dishonesty is widespread

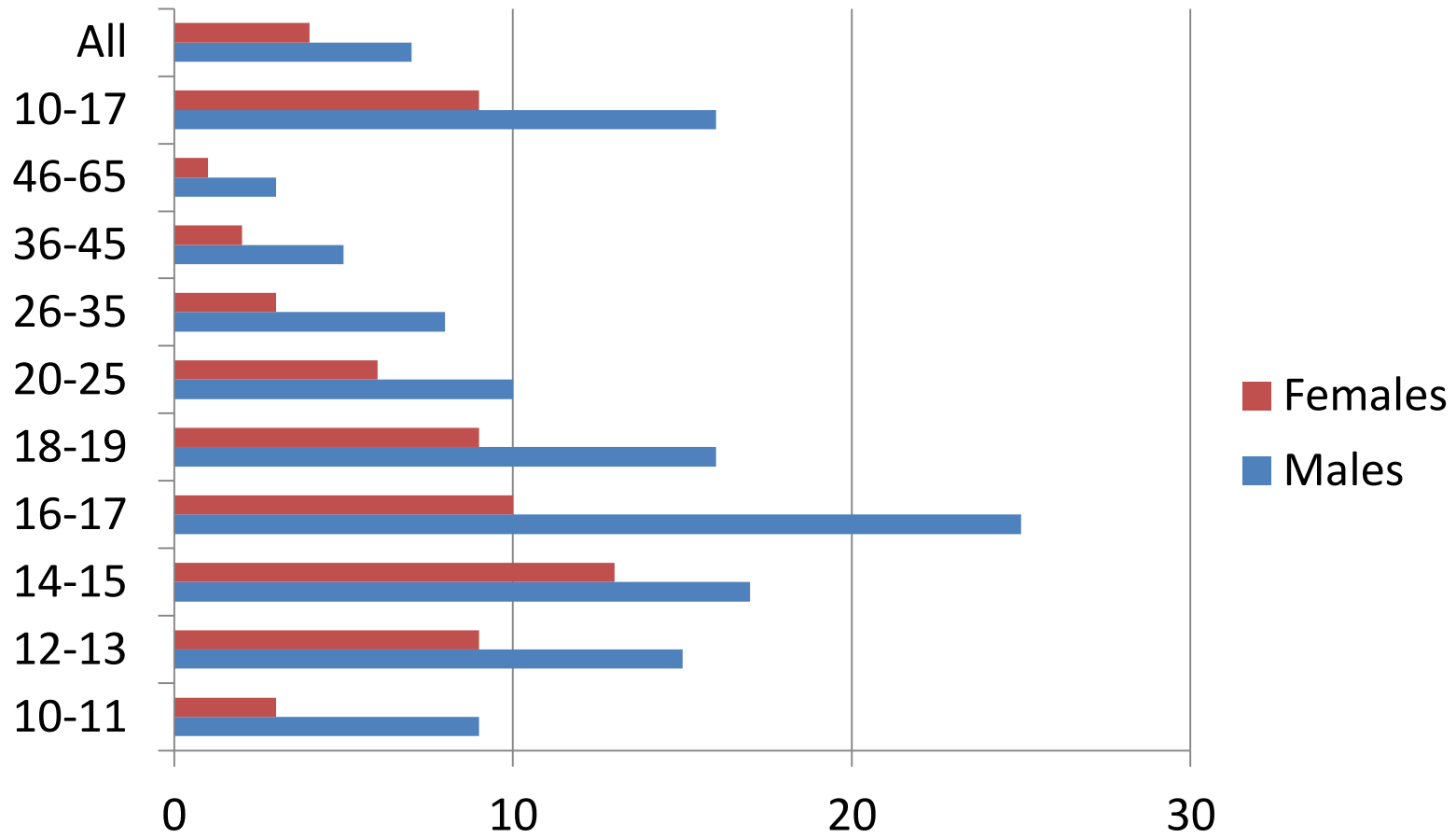
- In 1947, of 1,970 New York adults without a criminal record 99% admitted they had committed one or more of 49 crimes listed
- In England and Wales a third of males were found to have at least one conviction for a notifiable offence by the time they are 32

## c) Most crime is committed by a small minority

- In the US 5-6% of the population have been found to commit 50-60% of all recorded crime
- In England and Wales one per cent of the population making up 9% of offenders were found to commit 62% of offenses (reported or otherwise)
  - 11% of male offenders committed 66% of all offences by males
  - 6% of female offenders committed 53% of all offences by females

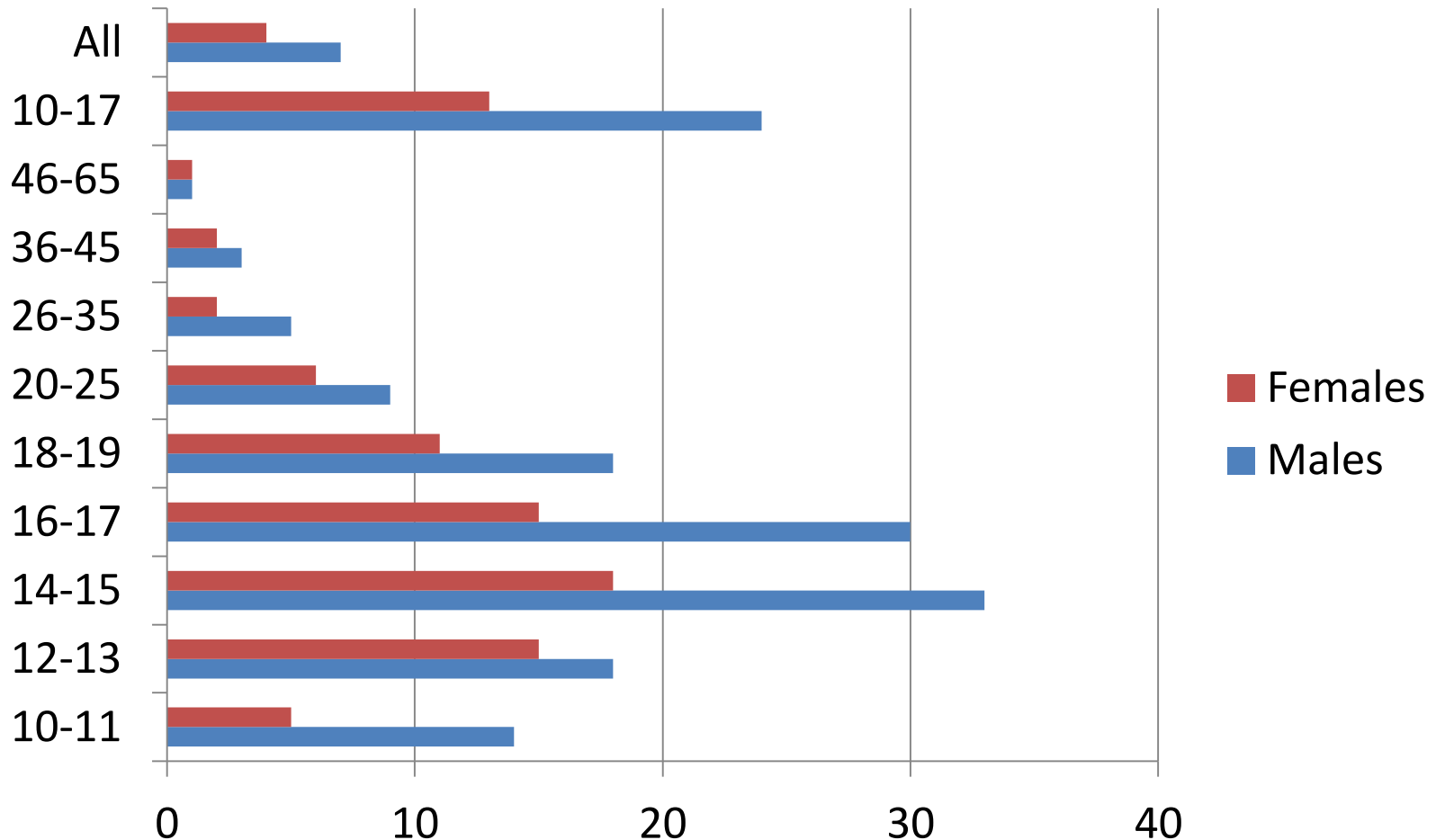
d) Crime is mostly masculine and mostly committed by the young

# Last year prevalence property crime by age (percent committing one or more)





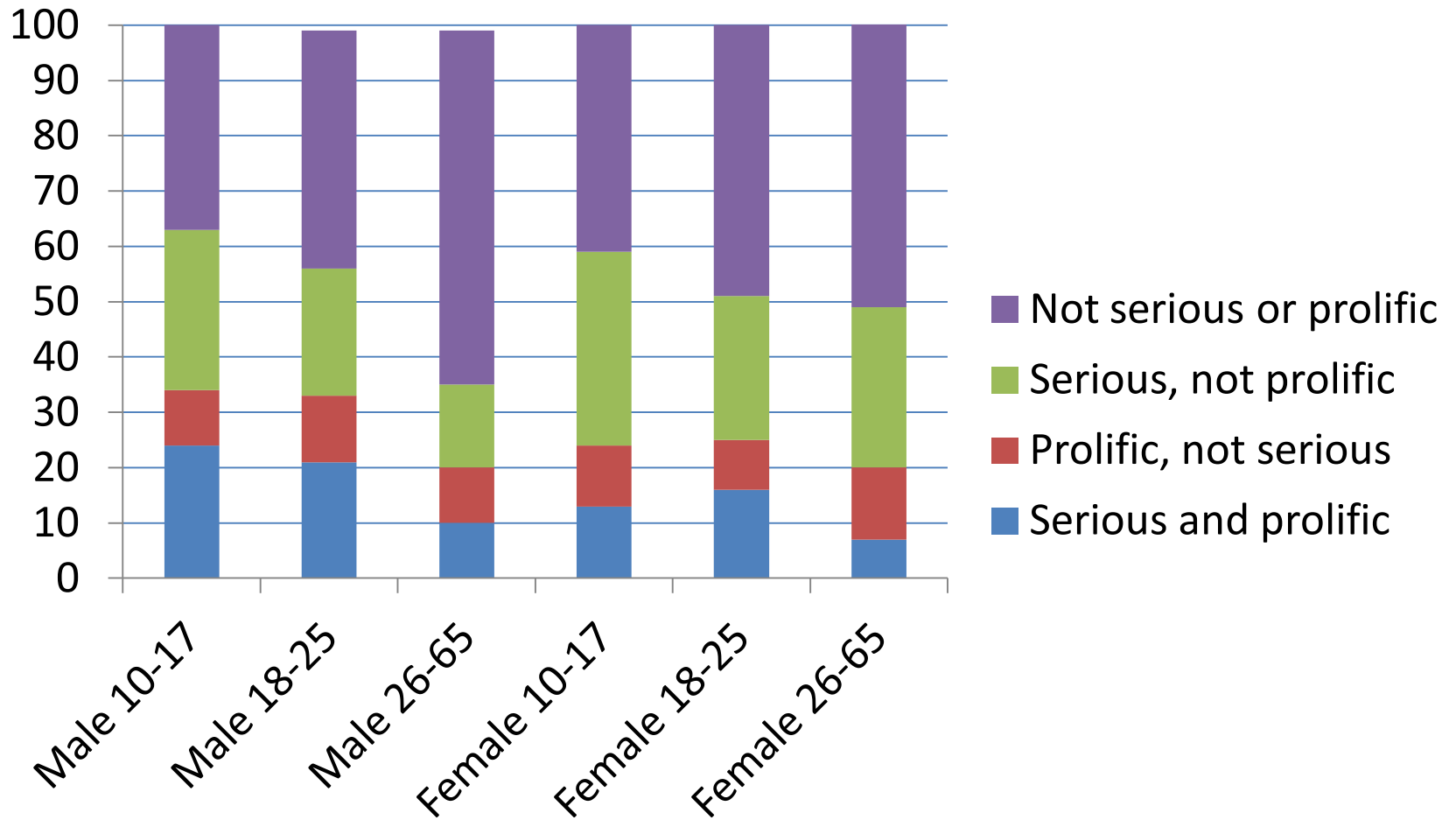
# Last year prevalence violent crime by age (percent committing one or more)



# Rate of offending by age and gender

	Males			Females		
	%sample	%offenders	%offences	%sample	%offenders	%offences
None	88			94		
One	4	35	4	2	36	5
Two	2	16	4	1	18	5
Three to five	3	21	9	2	24	13
Six to nine	1	8	6	1	9	9
Ten to nineteen	1	9	12	<0.5	8	15
Twenty or more	1	11	66	<0.5	6	53

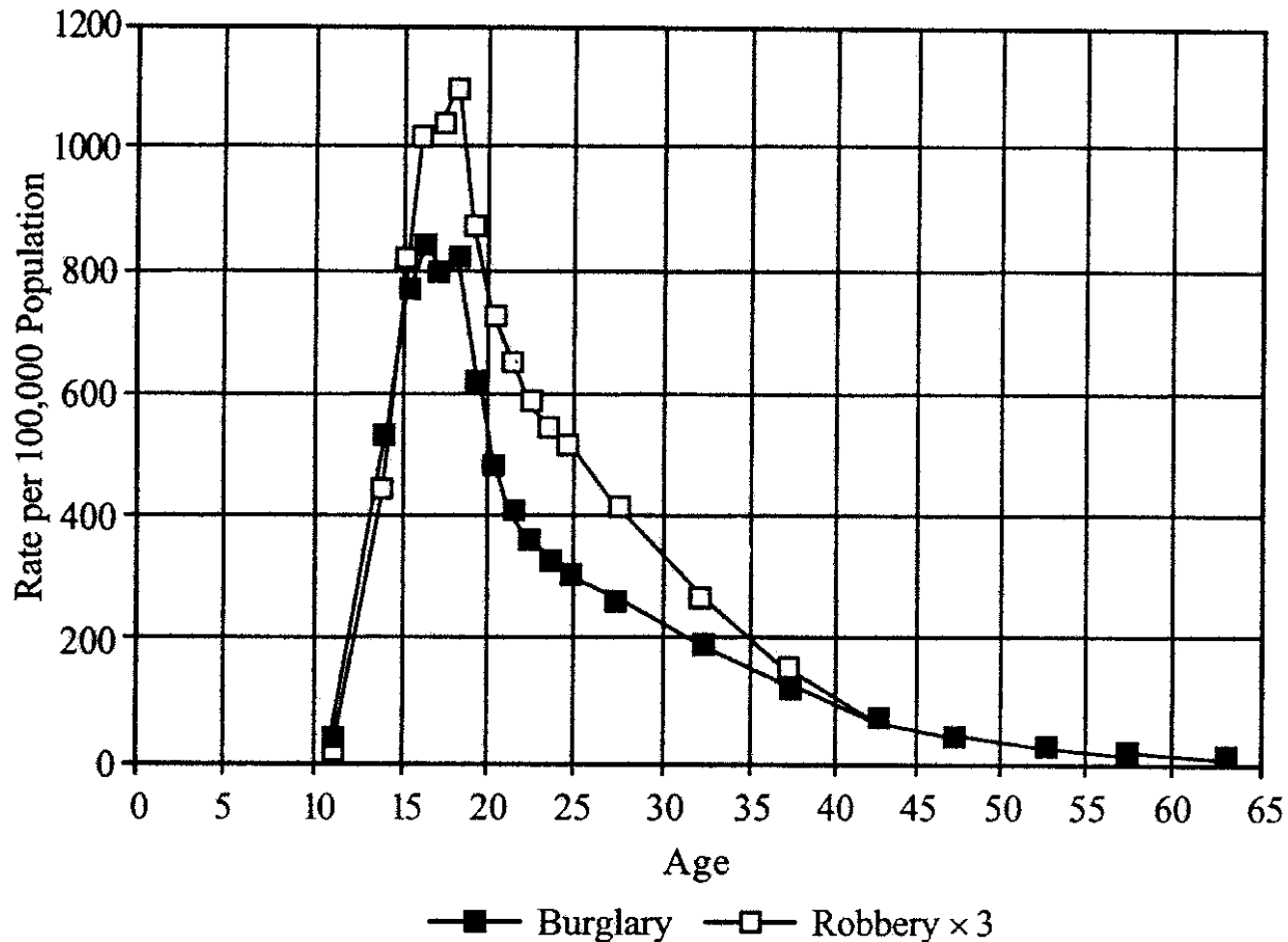
# Serious and prolific offending by age and gender



# Using recorded data

Figure 2b

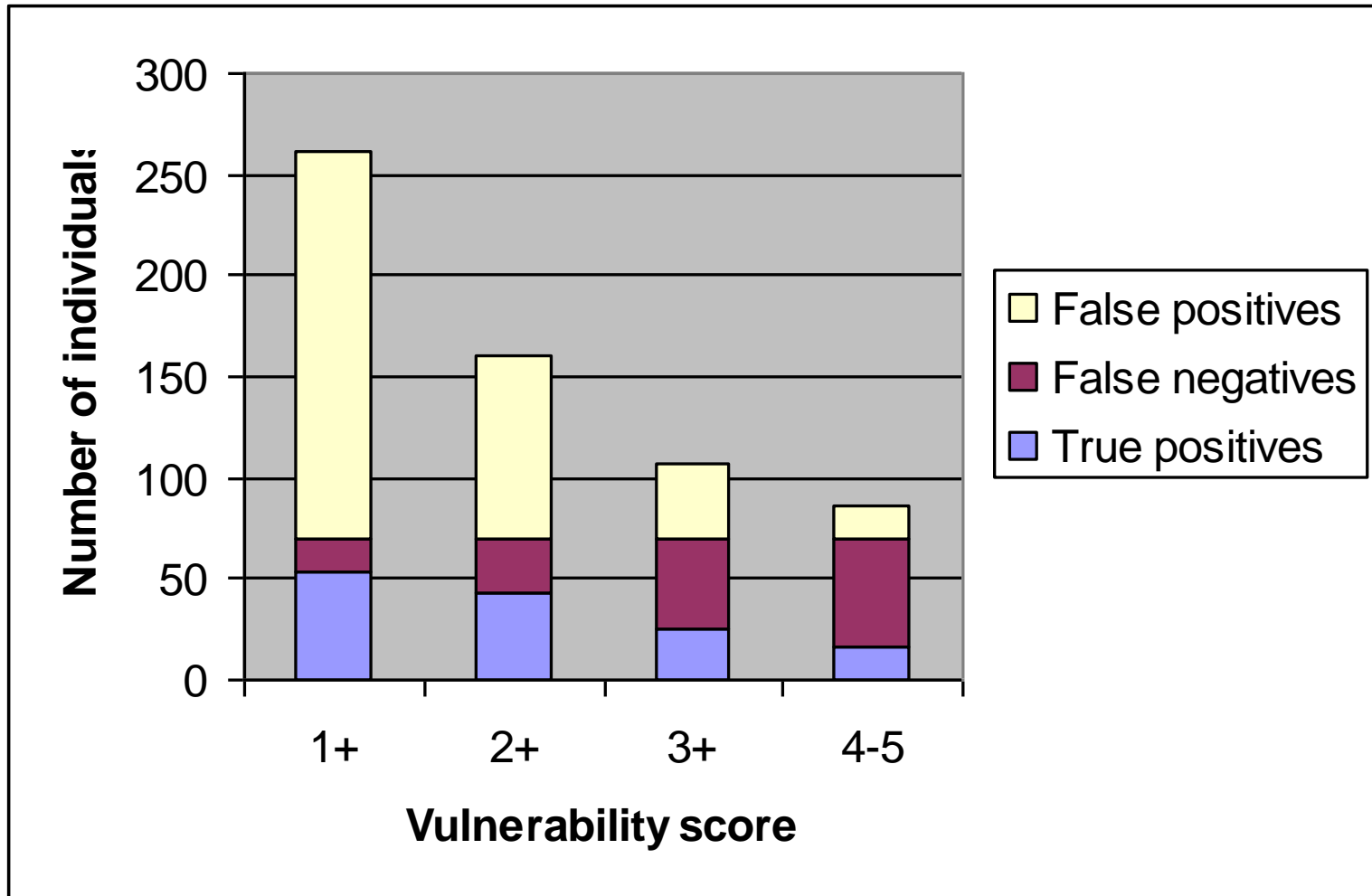
Age-Specific Arrest Rates  
Robbery and Burglary in 1992



# Key risk factors for persistent offending

- Disruptive child behaviour (e.g. troublesomeness)
- Criminality in the family (a convicted parent, a delinquent sibling)
- Low IQ or low school attainment
- Family factors, including poor child-rearing, a disrupted family and a young mother
- High daring, impulsiveness, or poor concentration
- Economic deprivation (low income, poor housing, large family size).

# The problem of false positives and false negatives



## e) Types of repeat offender

- Adolescent-limited
- Lifetime persistent
- But almost all age out of crime in the end

# Relevance of repeat offending to POP

- Dealing with repeat offending appears an efficient way of dealing with crime problems, if a relatively small number of individuals are causing a large proportion of the problem,.



# Repeat offending and other forms of crime concentration

- High crime neighborhoods have a high rate of crime partly because they have a disproportionate number of repeat victims
- Repeat offenders tend to be responsible for repeat victimisation
- Repeat offenders, repeat victims and hot spots are associated with one another

### 3. Approaches to reducing repeat offending

- a) Incapacitation of repeat offenders
- b) Deterrence of repeat offenders
- c) Informal social control of repeat offenders
- d) Treatment to reduce disposition to re-offend
- e) Drug treatment to reduce need to re-offend
- f) Mixed strategies
- g) Large-scale programs

# a) Incapacitation of repeat offenders

- Overall effects small given low detection rates and the finding that offences by prolific offenders are detected at a lower rate than those of non-prolifics.
- Targeted incapacitation can be effective in reducing volume crimes.
  - For example in the Netherlands enhanced prison sentences of 2 years were made available for habitual offenders for whom other preventive efforts had failed (minimum 10+ convictions with an average of 31, almost all of whom were unemployed drug-dependent older individuals). This was associated with substantial falls in volume crime, a reduction of around 100 thefts per annum for the incapacitation of one additional prolific offender.

## b) Deterrence of repeat offenders

- Given low detection rates, deterrence effects are generally deemed small amongst repeat offenders. For example, in the US it is estimated that there is a 1 in 30 chance of an inmate burglar being charged for any given burglary.
- With targeted publicity and swift and sure known responses, however, deterrence has been found to prevent specific crimes, for example gang-related shootings in Boston.

## c) Informal social control of repeat offenders

- Restorative conferencing has been used in part to try to prevent repeat offending through activating informal social control. Results have been mixed.
- Confronting offenders with the negative responses of those already close to them, who challenge their rationalisation for offending, has been found effective in reducing gang-related repeat offending.

## d) Treatment to reduce disposition to re-offend

- Overviews of evaluations have not found consistently effective treatment programs to reduce dispositions to offend repeatedly.
- Cognitive behavioral therapy shows some promise for some offenders.
- Repeat offender treatment programs are generally expensive.
- There are suggestions that targeting 'turning points,' where circumstances change for offenders, may provide a window for changing disposition.

## e) Drug treatment to reduce need to re-offend

- There tend to be high drop-out rates for drug treatment programs.
- There is some evidence of success where treatment is coerced.
  - The Dutch incarceration of prolific offenders was accompanied by coerced drug treatment.

## f) Mixed strategies

- The overlap between repeat offending and repeat victimisation has informed successful crime prevention strategies relating to burglary and domestic violence. Here, an initial low-key response is followed by efforts at detection (some covert) and invocation of the criminal justice system if there are successive repeat incidents.



## g) Large-scale general programs

- There have been various general programs to deal with repeat offenders.
  - E.g. Repeat Offender Program (ROP) in the US and Persistent and Prolific Offender (PPO) in England and Wales.
- ROPs have suffered implementation problems. With strong implementation suspected prolific offenders have been targeted and processed efficiently with longer sentences secured.
- The PPO program has tried to ‘prevent and deter’ young offenders, ‘catch and convict’ those involved but not yet under the control of the criminal justice system and ‘rehabilitate and resettle’ known offenders. Overall there was no convincing evidence of effectiveness in reducing criminality.

# 4. Deciding on repeat offending measures in POP: checklist

- a) Is your problem mostly produced by prolific or occasional offenders?
- b) Who are the current repeat offenders relevant to your problem?
- c) What are the particular attributes of the relevant repeat offenders? What facilitates their continued offending?
- d) Is targeting those who might offend in the future ethically justifiable?
- e) Will the current repeat offenders be replaced by others? If so, how will they routinely be identified?
- f) Are effective means available to address the relevant repeat offending?
- g) What alternative or complementary strategies are needed alongside attention to repeat offending?
- h) What has already been done locally to deal with repeat offenders producing your problem and what do you learn from this?

# Successful strategies

- Use data to analyse the repeat offending patterns for the target problem
- Identify systematically those individuals engaged in the repeat offending
- Focus intensively (and expensively) on those known to be prolific offenders
- Use relevant sticks and carrots to deter/disable offending and encourage relevant evidence-based treatment

# Take-home messages

- Retrospectively, offending is widely found to be concentrated on a small minority of prolific offenders
- Focusing crime prevention on repeat offenders depends on identifying them prospectively
- It is generally difficult to identify individual repeat offenders prospectively, but it is sometimes possible, for example:
  - Domestic violence
  - Bullying/harassment
  - Gang-related violence
  - Substance abusers living chaotic lives
- Carrot and stick approaches show promise as a general strategy to deal with many repeat offender problems
- Problem-solving is often better focused on places with a history of problems and a predictable future of problems than on prolific offenders