
**REDUCING THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR
VIOLENCE IN ROBBERY AND
PROPERTY CRIME:
THE PERSPECTIVES OF OFFENDERS
AND VICTIMS**

by

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Abstract: This paper reports on research undertaken in Western Australia in 1993 on violence associated with robbery and property crime. Firsthand accounts from 88 offenders and 10 victims are examined for information and perspectives that may be relevant to the prevention of such violence. Results suggest that violence occurring in the course of a robbery or a property crime is most effectively prevented by reducing the overall rate of these crimes. However, once an offender has confronted a victim, the victim's behaviour may be critical in preventing violence. Appreciating that offenders may be very afraid or even angry with the victim suggests a non-confrontational approach and one that may even facilitate the offender's escape.

INTRODUCTION

Stories regularly appearing in our newspapers of robbery and burglary victims being "senselessly" bashed by offenders cause great alarm in the community. Despite the terror associated with these events, only a small proportion of property crimes actually involve encounters between victims and offenders. This paper explores the prevalence and nature of violence

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associated with robbery and property crime, and how the risks of such violence may be minimised.

The first approach to reducing violence associated with property crime is to reduce the likelihood that an encounter with an offender will occur at all. As Cook (1985) demonstrates, the number of violent robberies remains a constant proportion of the total number of robberies in the U.S., and, therefore, the most effective way of preventing violence associated with robbery is to prevent robbery in general. The general prevention of crime through routine precautions will be discussed in the final section of this paper.

The second approach to preventing violence in property crime focuses on the confrontation between the victim and offender. In a robbery the confrontation can be planned by the offender, and generally robbers appear to avoid violence by achieving the consent of the victim through threats. However, phenomenological studies of robbery suggest that many robbers are motivated by the sense of power and dominance that the event offers (Katz, 1988). This may help explain why the literature on victim resistance is somewhat equivocal regarding the relationship between victim resistance and violence (see Cook, 1985, 1986, 1987). For example, Cook (1986) points out that in many cases of robbery resulting in victim injury, victims were resisting not to protect their property but because they believed that the offender(s) was about to use violence.

Cook (1986) discusses the problems in interpreting the available data on victim resistance:

Since we cannot distinguish between the influence of the robber's actions on the victim's response and the influence of the victim's actions on the robber's response, we are left simply not knowing how to interpret the statistical patterns of association between resistance and injury [p.414].

However, it is clear that robbery injuries are more likely to occur where the offender does not have a gun (e.g., see New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, 1987). Presumably the presence of a weapon obviates the need for any other display of dominance and will, as the weapon provides compelling support for the threat of force. Harding and Blake's (1989) study suggests that robbers choose weapons that appear intimidating as part of their "victim management strategy." Accounts of robbers (e.g., Gabor et al., 1987) suggest that the presence of a

weapon is likely to make the offender more confident and the victim less likely to resist.

The "managed robbery" can be contrasted with the sudden and unplanned confrontations between victims and offenders that sometimes occur in burglaries and car thefts. These confrontations are quite dangerous for the victim for a number of reasons. First, it is likely that the offender will not feel in control. Second, in the confusion the victim may be more likely to confront or resist the offender. Third, without a weapon the offender may not have any means to exert his or her will other than through the use of violence.

There are some robberies where violence is actually planned by offenders as a means of initiating the robbery. Muggings, as Katz (1988) points out, may actually represent a more immature form of robbery. Muggers may assault the victim to begin with because they anticipate the victim's resistance or do not trust their own abilities to manage the robbery. Katz (1988) points out that a mugging is the easiest form of robbery. By contrast, a "stick up" (threatening to use force) requires the offender to "face down" a victim. The skill of facing down, that is, using language and personal "presence" to "front" and threaten a victim, is often built on the knowledge that the offender *can* use violence if necessary. This skill or confidence is best gained through past experiences of robbery where violence was actually used (as in a "mugging"). In other words, for youths who may feel afraid of confronting a victim, attacking a victim from behind in a gang requires not only less courage but also less skill.

Another dimension to the problem of understanding victim-offender confrontation arises where a male property offender confronts a female victim. In these circumstances a different form of violence—sexual violence—may emerge. Warr (1988) argues that residential rapes committed by strangers and burglary are both crimes of "stealth" and have similar opportunity structures. Thus, the characteristics that make a dwelling attractive to a burglar will also appeal to a rapist. Households containing only one female adult are at risk because they present an easy target for both rape and burglary (not well-protected, no witnesses and confined space that is easier to take and manage control of).

Warr (1988) supports his argument with two pieces of evidence. First, a relatively high ($r = 0.79$) correlation is observed between rates of burglary and rape in 155 jurisdictions of the U.S. in 1980. Second, the sociodemographic variables associated with burglary also largely exist for rape based on 1980 U.S. census data ($r = 0.99$). The correlation between

the associated demographic factors is even higher than exists between aggravated assault and homicide. Controlling for the opportunity variables significantly reduces the correlation between rape and burglary, pointing to the importance of these variables.

Warr (1988) is thus arguing that home-intrusion rape (rape by a stranger-intruder in the victim's home) is a product of the opportunity structures of both rape and burglary. Some rape/burglaries will occur as an offender intent on one crime takes the opportunity to commit the other; however, the associations, Warr argues, come about because residences that present a target to burglars independently also present a target to rapists.

In a property crime, if the offender has switched his intention from theft (of property) to sex the issue of victim resistance becomes more complex. Grace (1993) provides a review of the literature on the value of physical resistance to sexual assault. Generally, studies in this area have found that verbal rather than physical resistance is more effective in preventing the completion of a sexual assault. However, Grace notes that the results are equivocal and that much depends on the location of the attack and other dynamics. But Grace (1993) does conclude that "all the research suggests that resistance does not result in an increase in severe injury" (p.23). Injury-free successful resistance seems most likely if the victim can escape before the violence escalates.

Apart from studying the interactional dynamics of the victim-offender encounter, there are a number of other factors specifically associated with offender psychology that can help explain why violence may sometimes occur in the course of a property crime. In particular, there are a number of studies that focus on how men who become violent perceive the nature of social interactions, construct meanings and calculate their options. These studies suggest that the perceptual field that many offenders enter the property crime scene with may have already tipped the balance in favour of violence.

The key problem stems from the calculation by the offender that violence is "necessary." This calculation appears to be the outcome of several cognitive distortions, common amongst violent men, which have been articulated by Novaco and Welsh (1989). First, they argue that being generally angry disposes a person to see aggression everywhere in much the same way that a hungry person sees food everywhere (this process is referred to by Novaco and Welsh as "attentional cueing"). The tendency of

offenders to perceive hostility (hostile attributional bias) has been well documented in a series of studies (e.g. Dodge et al., 1990; Driscoll, 1982).

Second, Novaco and Welsh (1989) point out that the more someone has been exposed to aggression, the more readily he or she will perceive aggression. For example, Shelly and Toch (1968) found that prisoners with histories of violence were more likely to pick up violent scenes in an ambiguous situation than prisoners with non-violent histories ("perceptual matching"). Wolfgang and Ferracuti's (1967) theory of the subculture of violence is also based on the notion that exposure to violence will have the effect of normalising the use of violence.

Third, Novaco and Welsh (1989) argue that violent people are more likely to see the behaviour of their victim preceding the assault as a result of a natural aggressiveness of the victim rather than a product of their (the victim's) fear ("attribution error"). Fourth, those who regularly or unnecessarily engage in violence are likely to be deficient in their ability to adopt alternative roles, and tend to think that they have no alternative but to respond violently ("false consensus"). This point is supported by the findings of Short and Simeonsson (1986), who found that delinquents have an underdeveloped ability to see a situation from different perspectives.

Finally, Novaco and Welsh (1989) argue that the tendency to continue to believe one's first impression concerning the other's intentions rather than adjusting it as the situation changes (anchoring effect) is a cognitive distortion relevant to violent behaviour. This tendency is maximised by high arousal such as anger or fear, which tends to block the incorporation of information that may correct the offender's original impression.

Novaco and Welsh's (1989) explanation of violence provides a valuable perspective on understanding why, contrary to common sense, an offender may perpetrate violence in the course of a property crime. For example, an offender engaged in a property crime when confronted by a victim may perceive the victim's actions as malevolent and, due to the anchoring effect and/or his high arousal, be unable to revise this perception of threat. The perception of malevolence will be maintained by the offender, even though the victim may be more afraid than the offender. This may help explain why in the situation where a car owner approaches a group of offenders in the act of stealing his car the offenders may attack the owner rather than take flight. According to the preceding discussion it is because the offender: is already angry; will perceive the owner's actions as aggressive; and considers the only appropriate (manly) response to be "fight fire with fire"* and "get in first." Even if the owner says "I don't want to hurt you,"

it is unlikely that the offender would believe him or her. Morrison (1993) provides a good example of the value of Novaco and Welsh's (1989) analysis:

Offenders often claimed to have interpreted their victims' actions as challenging, or threatening. But, in only a few cases did the victims appreciate that their actions might have appeared threatening to the offender. Most were left puzzled over what had sparked off the on-slaught [p. 29].

The likelihood of the offender attacking the owner is also heightened if the offender is in a group, not only because the group provides the necessary strength to overcome the victim but also because the psychological stakes are higher. As Morrison (1993) found, although offenders will dismiss the importance of the peer-group audience, victims of the same incidents see the effect of the audience as significant in most cases.

The foregoing discussion suggests a number of ways in which violence may occur in the course of a victim-offender confrontation. Although there has been considerable discussion of robbery violence, there have been few studies of why offenders involved in a property crime use violence. This paper reports on work conducted in Western Australia that attempted to explore this question by talking directly to offenders. This analysis is supplemented by interviews with victims of violence about how they perceived the situation. The term "violent property crime" is used to describe situations where a property crime (including robbery) is associated with actual violence.

Before looking at offenders' and victims' accounts, it is important to gain some perspective on the extent of violence associated with property crime. The discussion about preventive measures needs to be placed squarely in the context that most people (including offenders) want to avoid violence. It will be argued that more violence can be prevented by studying how most violence is naturally avoided.

THE LIKELIHOOD OF VIOLENCE IN PROPERTY CRIME

The major property offences where a victim may confront an offender are robbery, burglary and car theft. In Western Australia, with a population of 1,657,500 in 1992, there were 51,384 burglaries, 824 robberies and 17,243 vehicle thefts reported to the police. These figures significantly

underestimate the true extent of these crimes in the community because many victims don't report crimes to the police. The 1993 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) victimisation survey (ABS, 1994) provides an indication of the extent of underreporting. Using the survey results as a guide we can estimate that in Western Australia in 1992 there was a total of approximately 101,544 burglaries, robberies and vehicle thefts (indicating that for the offences combined the reporting rate was 68%). The main reason given by victims for not reporting the offence to the police, particularly in regard to robbery—the crime most likely to result in injury—was that the event was trivial (ABS, 1994). Therefore the crimes reported to the police largely represent the more serious two-thirds of offences committed. Yet police have records of only 433 cases in 1992 where victims of robbery or property crime sustained any injuries, which represents approximately one half of one percent of the offences reported. Further, in 393 (91%) of the 433 cases the injury was listed as "minor."

To explore the nature of the violence in violent property crimes, all offence reports recorded by the police in Western Australia for 1992/93 where there was either a robbery (N= 1,027) or a property crime accompanied by an offence against the person (N=435) were reviewed and classified. Each offence report contains a "narrative"—a description of the actual event in which the offence(s) occurred. This portion the report was used as the basis for the subsequent classification. The classification procedure aimed at isolating those cases most likely to contain instances of gratuitous violence for further investigation.

Forty (2.7%) of the cases had to be discarded as they were listed as false reports or had insufficient information. Most (69%) of the remaining offence reports involved forceful physical contact between the victim and offender. However, in only 55% of the cases involving a robbery offence alone was any physical contact made. In 148 of all the cases involving physical contact the context was a personal dispute (the victim and offender knew each other). Offence reports involving evidence of actual violence that was not part of a personal dispute were then examined to see if the violence was described in a way that could be classified as "instrumental" in either getting property or escaping from the crime scene. To meet this classification, the violence described needed to be relatively brief and directly related to the attempt by the offender to get the property or to escape. This operational definition of instrumental violence was applied to all the offence reports. Any cases involving considerable force

that could not be readily ascertained as being related to getting the goods or getting away were grouped together for further investigation.

Eventually 25.9% (N=216) of cases of actual violence (with personal disputes excluded) fell into this category. Of the 216 cases where the violence was not classified as "instrumental," almost a quarter (N=52) appeared to involve a sexual motive. Because the classification procedure was designed to be over-inclusive, selecting into the final group all cases where there was doubt about the nature of the violence, many of the cases in the final category actually involved an instrumental motive even though this was not obvious from the narrative.

This analysis suggests that the intention of offenders engaged in most robberies and property crimes is to "get the goods and get away." Although victim resistance and other aspects of offender psychology that have been discussed may result in panic, confusion and ultimately violence, it does not appear that violence is intended by most offenders. Detailed interviews with victims and offenders are needed to explore more closely how offenders approach and deal with confrontations with victims in property crime situations. These will be described in the following sections.

OFFENDERS' PERSPECTIVES

Offenders' accounts were obtained from 88 prisoners held in Western Australian prisons in the latter part of 1993. Prisoners whose records indicated a conviction for a violent property crime were approached and invited to participate in the research. The selection procedure was not designed to achieve a sampling of any particular group such as armed robbers or those convicted of violent offences.

Prisoners were asked to read an "informed consent" form containing information about the research and stressing the voluntary nature of the prisoner's participation. It was explained that any violent property crime the offender had been engaged in could be the subject of the interview. The crime need not have led to conviction or even have been reported to the police. The only criteria were that the offenders themselves had to have used some force, and some theft had to have occurred. Perhaps because of the strict ethical requirements, such as signing the consent form, just over half (54%) of the offenders invited to participate in the research declined. The results should, therefore, be interpreted as suggestive, and

caution should be adopted in generalising them to all violent property crime offenders.

Each prisoner could nominate one or two incidents of violence they personally had perpetrated in the course of a property crime. The majority (60%) could, or would, only nominate one incident for exploration. The 88 offenders interviewed reported a total of 123 incidents of violent property crime for analysis. Because the maximum number of incidents any one offender could offer was two, it is not likely that any particular offender or type of offender will significantly affect the range or type of incident discussed. Twenty-four (20%) of the incidents discussed involved a burglary; 42 (34%), a robbery in a shop; 27 (22%), a robbery in the street; 16 (13%), a car theft; and 14 (11%), disputes over drugs or other situations. The demography of the offenders interviewed closely resembled that of the state's prison population, 94% being male and 29% Aboriginal.

To check on the validity of offenders' accounts a number of prosecution files were reviewed. The review found that although some accounts "minimised" the extent of the violence used by offenders, or the offender chose to discuss offences of a less serious nature, there were also cases where offenders "maximised" their violence. That is, they talked about their violence as being more serious or extensive than revealed in the statement of facts compiled by the prosecution. As will be discussed further, it is important to view offenders' accounts critically, and to acknowledge that various distortions of memory and perception can combine to diminish the factual accuracy of their accounts.

Motive and Background to the Violence

The majority of motives (80%) given by offenders for their use of violence suggest that it was directly instrumental to the commission of the crime or the escape from the crime scene (in 9% it was sexual, and in the remaining 12% it involved interpersonal disputes, drug raids or other motives). Whether this accurately reflects offenders' motives, or simply the reality that offenders experience or are willing to project, is debatable. For example, in her study comparing 79 victim-offender pairs involved in violence, Morrison (1993) found that only 45% of the pairs agreed on the offenders' motivation for the attack.

Another problem with any attempt to reduce offenders' motives into one category is that searching for one motive for the use of violence fails to reflect the dynamic nature of these events. Although one motive may

initially be present, the situation can shift quickly so that in the one scene there may be many motives operating.

"Instrumental" Motives

In almost half (49%) the cases analysed, offenders claimed violence was used to overcome the resistance of the victim, as illustrated in the following examples. Each account is labelled by the offender number (O.N.) to which it relates. In these cases the offenders considered that the violence used was necessary or justified.

O.N. 25: *We counted the staff and then went in when we realised that all the staff had gone, except for the Manager. We went in, grabbed the Manager, threw him against the fridge door. He bounced off, I had a knife, the knife hit him. He thought that he was being attacked. He put his hands up. I thought he was going to attack me. so I stabbed him in the hand, then threw him on the ground.*

O.N. 94: *I told the bloke to get on the floor, but he wouldn't listen. He was trying to cover up the cash box that was underneath the counter, and so he got down on his knees. He wouldn't lie face down on the floor with his hands behind his back. So I got him up, and I just hit him around the jaw and throat area. I got him down and once he was down, I just took the money away.*

These accounts suggest that from the offender's point of view the violence used is "instrumental," or "rationally" employed to achieve the goals of the crime. However, a threat of violence is usually sufficient to achieve the financial goals of the crime, and most robberies can be successfully carried out without the use of violence. Why then do offenders often use violence *before* demanding money, (for example, as in a mugging)? As discussed earlier, this type of robbery requires less skill and less courage. Offenders' accounts point to two other reasons why a mugging may be more attractive to an offender than a face-to-face robbery. First, victim compliance cannot be guaranteed, and the "violence first" approach overcomes any uncertainty. Second, unless the offender is equipped with a disguise, nonviolent confrontation gives the victim a chance to see the offender and thus identify him at a later stage. A mugging quickly disables

the victim and minimises the opportunity for identification of the offenders).

One implication of this line of reasoning is that where offenders perceive victim resistance to be likely, violence may initiate the robbery as a matter of course. A number of offenders suggested that "a good robbery is a quick robbery." Anything that could be done to minimise the time from initial contact to departure with the goods was desirable. From the offender's perspective, it was this time gap in which things could go wrong that was critical. A quick robbery maximises the robber's control through the advantage of surprise. The longer the encounter takes, the more chance there is that the victim can think about—or even mount—resistance, or that some other unexpected event may occur.

The issue of control does appear critical and it was a central construct in many robbers' accounts. A common fear expressed by robbers is that someone else will come along before the robbery is completed. The person who "comes along" is a threat because he or she is not already engaged in the scene, and the diversion of attention opens up new opportunities and possibilities for victims. Furthermore, the actions of the newcomer are likely to be more unpredictable. In one case, violence was used against one victim when another victim entered the scene. The violence was used to retain control of the victim whilst the other victim was dealt with:

O.N. III

Interviewer: *What happened just before you hit him?*

Offender: *I just came up behind him, and I just sort of put the crow bar on his neck. Because it was cold, he must of thought it was a gun. and I said "listen, get down on the floor please, I don't want any trouble, face down." I had him on the ground. Then the lady comes out. and she walks in on us from this other room. She started screaming so I gave him a little whack, run over to her and grabbed her by the arm, and dragged her back over and said "get down on fucking ground, you bitch."*

Interviewer: *So you didn't hit him before he laid on the ground?*

Offender: *No.*

Interviewer: *And you hit him at that stage—why?*

Offender: *At the stage I had to hit him, because the lady came out from another office and starting screaming around. So I hit him and said "lay down" to him.*

Interviewer: *He was already laid down?*

Offender: *Yeh, I know, but I don't know why I say that—/ had to say that to keep him laying down "don't get up," you know.*

The case cited above suggests that violence may sometimes be used for its strategic value. Although the use of violence was not "necessary," it worked to communicate the complete dominance of the offender and to reinforce the compliance of the victim. From the offender's viewpoint it was a case of "better to be safe than sorry."

Escape

In 30% of cases, offenders accounted for their use of violence as necessary to avoid capture and arrest. The "escape" motive may also be seen as instrumental, but in these situations violence is used not to perpetrate the crime but to escape from the crime scene. The thoughts of offenders in these cases concern the fear of being captured and/or physically beaten. In these examples, all the offenders saw the violence they used as necessary.

O.N. 13: *We were in a shop looking for the safe. Then we had security pull up. They checked the doors, and they realised we were in the building. Then they called the police. Then they came out of the car and kept walking up and down, and that yelling at us to come out and that. We ended up having to king hit them [hit them hard] with crow bars and that.*

O.N. 68: */ was involved in a break-in with another bloke, and I was in the house and the bloke came home. My co-offender took off and left me in there, and the bloke tried to hit me. So I ducked under his punch and put a screwdriver through his guts. I took off and his brother, or whoever it was that was there, followed me...*

Sexual

In 9% of cases of violence discussed, the nature of the violence was sexual. Sometimes the offender admitted to engaging in sexual assault when the opportunity became available, but claimed that the initial

motivation was to complete a property crime. The alternative background is that the initial motive was sexual and the property crime occurred as an "add on." In some cases, the two motives are mixed, and it is difficult to determine the true sequence, if, indeed, there is one.

The link between the predatory nature of burglary and home-intrusion rape is illustrated in the following case. The offender explained that one night when he was very drunk he broke into a flat in the same block as where he was living. When he couldn't find any money he became frustrated (according to him) and raped the woman occupant. The offender responding to the question: "What thoughts were going through your head just before you raped her?" answered: "If I can't get any money I will have sex."

Other Motives

In the remaining 12% (N=15) of accounts the motives for violence varied, but most (N=9, 60% of this group) involved a motive that could be described as a vigilante action or some other form of retaliation, often in the context of drug deals. In a further three cases, the violence occurred in the context of an argument. In two cases the offender was unable to discern the main motive for the violence, and the remaining case was a paid contract bashing/robbery.

Offenders' Intoxication and Control over their Aggression

Although the picture emerging from offenders' accounts is dominated by instrumental considerations, offenders' use of drugs and alcohol is considerable, and this may affect their judgment and reactions. Seventy percent of offenders were intoxicated {with drugs and/or alcohol) or "hanging out" (experiencing withdrawal effects) when engaging in the violent property crime, as shown in Table 1. However, two-thirds of the offenders said they felt in control of their aggression. This apparent contradiction may be explained by the analysis provided by Cromwell et al. (1991). These authors suggest that burglars use drugs and alcohol to dampen their fear, thus allowing them to process more information on the crime scene, not less. It is argued that this is because the heightened state

of arousal associated with fear blocks the sort of "parallel processing" needed by burglars to carry out the burglary and keep aware of danger at the same time.

Table 1: Offenders' State and Type of Intoxication during Violent Property Crimes

Type of intoxication	Number	Percent
No drugs or alcohol	25	20.3
Alcohol but not "drunk"	12	9.8
"Hanging out" or "looping"	7	5.7
Alcohol—"drunk"	14	11.4
Cannabis alone	4	3.2
Alcohol and cannabis	13	10.6
Amphetamines alone	17	13.8
Amphetamines and other drugs	11	8.9
Heroin	7	5.7
Other drug combination	13	10.6
Total	123	100

Offenders' Perceptions on the Prevention of Violence in Property Crime

Offenders mostly described their emotions preceding the violence in terms of a justifiable anger or being placed in an "impossible position." During the actual violence, offenders reported that their thoughts were mainly concerned with "getting the job finished" (16%), overcoming victim resistance (18%) or avoiding capture (15%). In 10% of cases offenders could not recall clearly what they were thinking. In 16% of cases offenders stated categorically that they didn't think anything. In 8% of cases thoughts concerned "teaching the victim a lesson." In 5% of cases their thoughts focused on sex. In the remaining 11% of cases their thoughts varied over a range of foci. Much of the violence was described by offenders as spontaneous and reactive. Actions were commonly described as "instinctive" or determined directly by the actions of others. For example, confrontation by property owners was seen as leading to violence because it "was either him or me." A number of offenders argued that they "don't think" in the crime scene because everything happens too quickly.

A series of questions sought to explore how the violence the offender engaged in might have been avoided, and what might be done to prevent violence associated with property crime. In response to the question "*How do you think the victim could have handled the situation to have avoided the violence?*," the most common reply was that "they couldn't," or the victim should simply not resist the demands of the offender or not try to capture or hinder the offender. These responses made up 84% of Replies to this question.

On the subject of the prevention of violent property crime in general, it seemed as if most of the offenders were, again, quite fatalistic. The use of violence was described by many offenders as a natural part of life and accepted without revulsion. Comments that minimised the importance of violence and the effect of violence on victims were common. Many offenders talked about how they were brought up in environments where violence was common and thus "violence is just a part of life." Others explained the use of violence as necessary to deal with the challenges that faced them ("fight fire with fire"). The theme of desperation emerged in many offenders' accounts—that offenders are desperate and will do whatever is necessary to gain access to the property or avoid capture.

The question voiced by many in the community as to why car thieves should turn on the car owner rather than fleeing is addressed in a number of accounts. In this type of situation, two aspects of offenders' perceptions appear to be central. First, as discussed earlier, where an audience is present (particularly where the audience consists of fellow gang members), young offenders may seize the opportunity of physical advantage to display prowess.

Violence was explained by a number of offenders as defensive or precautionary. However, these perceptions need to be interpreted in the context of the cognitive distortions articulated by Novaco and Welsh (1989). Indeed, rather than seeing the victims' behaviour as justified, it appears that offenders often feel angry with the victim. In half the cases analysed, offenders reported feeling anger or excitement during the violence. The defiance of the victim is explained by the offender in the following account as an affront:

O.N. 21: *It made us angry that he thought he could stop us. He came up to us, but he could see there was a big mob of us.*

The appearance of the property owner may signal to an offender the need to fight, to get the property, to overcome the resistance of the victim or to defend himself against an expected attack. In the offender's state of intoxication, fear or anger, these motives may not be highly differentiated, as expressed in the following account:

O.N. 80:.../ [had] *stolen a few cars, and people come running out and it looks like they want to use violence on you, so you just use it on them first.*

The message is that offenders engaged in a theft are in a highly volatile state, and, whether justified or not, they expect resistance and attempts by others to capture them. When confronted they may initiate violence (as they expect it from the owner) before thinking of running off, particularly if they judge their resources in the fight as superior.

The study of offenders' perspectives may help us understand why they perpetrate violence. However, offenders' accounts are likely to be flawed because memory is at least as subjective as perception, and it is likely that the material facts of the event in question are unlikely to be recalled with a high degree of accuracy. What may be remembered by the offender is

not only likely to be a salutary interpretation of his or her actions but a distorted (and advantageous) remembrance of what actually happened. In other words, the cognitive distortions discussed earlier will not only lead to a misunderstanding in the offender of victim intention, but it will also contribute to a convenient—if unconscious—distortion of what actually happened in the event. One way to expose this memory distortion is through an examination of victims' accounts, particularly where these can be contrasted directly with the offender's accounts of the same incident. This is the purpose of the next section.

VICTIMS* PERSPECTIVES

To reach a group of victims of violent property crime, all offence reports containing a robbery offence or a combination of property and violent offences (N=1,462) for one year (1992/93) were reviewed. As explained earlier, in 216 cases there was actual violence, the event was not part of a dispute and the motive for the violence was not readily apparent (as being "instrumental" to the property crime or the offender's escape). Victims of these crimes may be able to explain something of the dynamics of violence in cases where the motive for the violence did not appear to be "instrumental" to the financial aspect of the crime.

The victims of these 216 incidents were approached by way of a letter posted by the police department. Victims were invited to post or phone back a reply to the request for an interview. Victims received in the envelope sent by the police two letters outlining the project, and another requesting that they contact the Crime Research Centre (a stamped, self-addressed envelope was included). Ten victims responded and were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire to probe their perceptions of what happened and how they responded. The selection procedure meant that the group contained an overrepresentation of victims of the most extreme forms of violence. Many of the victims of these more extreme forms of violence may have been reluctant to talk about their experience, or the low response rate may have been a product of the highly ethical but also highly cautious approach required in this research, which did not permit a more proactive strategy of inviting victim participation. Whatever the reason, the low response rate severely limits the generalizability of the findings, and this caution should be borne in mind when reading the following section.

Managing the Crime Scene

Almost all victims experienced feelings of shock, surprise, fear or horror when initially confronted by the offender. Thoughts during the situation mainly concerned survival. In most of the cases where the event took place for more than a few minutes, victims described how they began to think strategically about how to escape, avoid violence or get the offender out of the house. Most victims remained afraid that the offender(s) would use violence.

V.N. 1

Interviewer: *What was your intention when you were confronted by the offender(s)?*

Victim: *Survival. I did not want to give them any reason or justification for using violence.*

It seems trite to say that property is less valuable than physical integrity, yet some victims resist offenders and place themselves in great danger to "protect" their property. For example, when confronted by two young men who wanted his money, one elderly victim said "go ahead and try," which they subsequently did and beat him up badly. Rather than reassessing the value of his resistance, the victim was most upset at his inability to protect his own property and intimated that he had taken action to increase his ability to defend himself in the future. However, most victims appear to quickly calculate their points of vulnerability and strength, as do offenders. For example, for women alone in a house having children present adds to their vulnerability and they are likely to comply with the offender's demands in an effort to protect their children.

Victims' Perception of Offenders' Motives for the Violence

Victims' perceptions of offenders' motives varied, but there were some interesting points of contrast. A number of victims mentioned how offenders seemed to be enjoying the violence. Only one of the 88 offenders interviewed admitted enjoying violence, and in none of the offenders' accounts was mention made of any laughter associated with violence. But

this association (laughter as the violence was perpetrated) did emerge in three of the ten victim accounts. The data set, however, is not representative as it was specifically designed to exclude the majority of encounters where the violence used appeared to be minor and limited to the instrumental function of getting the goods or getting away. The following examples illustrate how victims saw the sense of power enjoyed by the offender as being a substantial motivator for the violence:

V.N. 9

Interviewer: *What do you think the motive of the offender was when he entered the scene?*

Victim: *To break into the service station.*

Interviewer: *Do you think they actually enjoyed the violence?*

Victim: *OK yes, they enjoyed the violence. No two ways about it—he knew he had the **power...** He was psyched up to do it. He was liking the power.*

V.N. 7

Interviewer: *What do you think the motive of the offender was when he entered the scene?*

Victim: *Strictly getting a thrill—he was not deterred by my husband at all.*

V.N. 2

Interviewer: *Why did they keep kicking you after they got the wallet?*

Victim: *Because they've got the upper hand—one starts to weaken, the [offender] got pleasure, he was laughing...he loved it.*

Lyng (1993) has suggested that young males may be attracted into crime because it presents an opportunity to confront their fear, and the overcoming of fear is particularly exhilarating for young men (see also Daly and Wilson, 1994, on the young male syndrome). The contrasting perceptions of victims and offenders on issues of how offenders appear whilst perpetrating violence is a potentially productive form of further research,

and may be a useful source for therapeutic intervention with violent offenders.

Contrasting Victims' Accounts with Offenders' Accounts

The difference between the accounts of victims and offenders is most dramatically demonstrated when both describe the same incident. Only two such comparison cases are available in the present study. In one of the most graphic incidents of violent property crime, the victim described how the offender perpetrated various acts of violence for over three hours. The offender, however, gave a different story:

O.N. 3: ...When they said they would call the police, I said I wouldn't be there when the police arrived. I turned to leave, they stood in the doorway and said... "you're not leaving till the police arrive." ...I tried to push him out of the way, he grabbed hold of my shirt, and I gave him a punch. And then I felt a pain in my back... [the offender then describes how he ran out of the house away from the victims].

The victim of this offender described a totally different scene, which he and the other victims were set upon by the offender. According to the victim, the offender proceeded to brutally bash and terrorise, them after which, in fear of his life, he made a feeble (the victim was elderly and the offender young) attempt to retaliate:

Victim's account of the same situation:

The victim is describing the offender's first act of violence, which followed the offender being confronted directly by a co-victim, "Jack":

V.N. 6: ...He then switched completely. First he screamed, then took his arm back and hit Jack in the face.

He was standing in front of the door and made no effort to go. Blood splattered in all directions, He gave blows to each person. He went berserk, he was totally in control. He made no attempt to escape. He then turned around and ordered Jack and Bill into the kitchen. He looked around for me and said "you too." He terrorised us for three hours.

These two cases, where the victim and offender accounts are available from the same situation, illustrate how important it is to compare the two perspectives. Other accounts from victims contained on prosecution files also often contradict the accounts given by offenders. The point is important because it is quite possible that these contrasting accounts represent more than the convenient reconstruction of events by the offender. It is possible that victims and offenders view the same event very differently, and it is particularly where these views most differ that the chances for violence are maximised. After the event, both victim and offender may be motivated to remember the situation in a way that rationalises their own behaviour.

In the case where the young offender beat three elderly men, and in the earlier situation where an elderly man confronted two young offenders, the victims had underestimated their vulnerability and may have assumed that the age status would be sufficient to claim dominance. However, at least in the case involving three victims, the offender probably did feel as if he was about to be apprehended. The violence may, therefore, have begun as part of an escape attempt, though it appears to quickly have become much more than that.

The contrasting perspectives of victims and offenders can be used to illustrate the importance of victim precautionary measures. This subject is explored further in the following section.

INTEGRATING VICTIM AND OFFENDER PERSPECTIVES INTO CRIME PREVENTION

Criminological approaches to crime prevention typically focus on offenders: offender motivation, offender decision making and offender rehabilitation. However, everyday efforts at crime prevention are largely initiated by victims or potential victims. Victim behaviour, including victim demeanour, is critical in minimising the likelihood of both personal and property crime. Many women reduce the likelihood of predatory victimisation by restricting their activity cycles, and people in general avoid confrontations that may become violent. The social and personal consequences of these forms of crime prevention are not usually considered in criminology. Recently, Felson and Clarke (1995) have discussed the notion of integrating a study of routine precautions taken by citizens into the

study of crime prevention. Such an integration could incorporate the routine avoidance of potentially violent situations.

There are a number of ways to think about efforts at preventing violence in the course of a robbery or a property crime, which I have described in more detail elsewhere (see Indermaur, 1995). In relation to the role of the victim in crime prevention, it is possible to conceptualise two levels. First, and probably most important, the potential victim prevents crime through routine precautions and activities that minimise the likelihood of coming into contact with offenders and/or violence. The range of activities that citizens engage in to avoid violence is profound. Strategies, sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious, range from choosing to live in a safe suburb to avoiding walking on certain streets (or streets anywhere). Crime prevention is integrated into many everyday practices and Felson and Clarke (in press) point out that individuals devote considerable attention to avoiding crime through taking routine precautions. The curtailment of routine activity associated with the fear of crime is a large subject worthy of greater study. Certain sectors of the population, such as women and the elderly, take greater precautions because they believe, rightly or wrongly, that they are at risk and that victimisation will have extensive and permanent effects on their quality of life.

The second level at which a potential victim minimises violence is once the confrontation with the offender has begun. This area of influence can be described as "crime scene management," and relates to the literature on victim resistance. In a situation in which the victim is confronted by an offender, he or she may be able to avoid or minimise violence by complying with the offender's demands and not attempting to restrain the offender. Especially where the offender is engaged in stealing property, the facilitation of the offender's essential mission (to get the goods and get away) would seem the safest course of action. However, many victims choose to try and protect their property (women clutch their handbags and men rush out of the house to confront car thieves), and would object to an attitude of "giving in" to criminals.

The issue of resistance may also interact with the psychological needs of the victim. It may be important to some victims to resist even if they are not likely to be successful. For example, one victim of a vicious attack objected to the standard "don't resist" advice. This victim argued that it was important to a victim's self-esteem not to just give in to an attack but to fight back. The victim, who had suffered severe injuries, also focused on both the psychological and larger social consequences of a policy of

non-resistance. However, as noted earlier, the relationship between resistance and injury is complex. And, as pointed out by Cook (1987), non-resistance is no guarantee of non-injury and, in some cases, victims will minimise injury through their resistance.

Understanding where the offender is "coming from" may help victims consider their options. Property offenders are generally highly excited and afraid of intervention by victims or guardians. In this context anything that "raises the alarm" and invites intervention, such as a scream, will be threatening to the offender and may work to precipitate an escape. However, the risk with this strategy is that the offender, either through panic or in a calculated way, may attack the victim to eliminate the noise. Although some robbers may expect and plan for the sounding of an alarm, a more effective strategy for burglars and car thieves may be to bring the offender's attention to the likelihood of an alarm being sounded. This is the principle behind the display of car alarm warnings, lights and decals.

The general principle underlying all these strategies is to make it more attractive to the offender to avoid confrontation or to flee the scene as quickly as possible. From the offender's point of view, the unknown factors are the size and nature of a victim's resources and how quickly support will arrive. Victims would be well advised to maximise the chances that offenders will perceive that they have been (or will be) detected. In this regard, it is interesting to note how the proliferation of portable phones and video surveillance cameras will add to the possibilities for victims to raise the alarm. To be most effective, these possibilities should be drawn to the attention of offenders or potential offenders. Portable phones (with memory dialing) should perhaps be made available to people in vulnerable service industries and in locations where crime is more likely to occur. Advertising the fact that alarms can be raised instantaneously could make a target much less attractive to some thieves, although others may include the likelihood of an alarm sounding in their planning and still judge that the rewards outweigh the risks.

As the statistics on robbery violence suggest, most offenders want to complete a property crime without interference or violence. Apart from robbers, most offenders do not seek, or welcome, a confrontation with a victim. Partly because of the anxiety of being discovered and partly because of drug and/or alcohol intoxication, offenders may not operate rationally or be easy to reason with when confronted. A combination of strategic planning to avoid opportunities for robbery, together with a better appreciation of the ways victims can, and do, prevent crime and the

escalation of crime, appears to offer the most hope in reducing the already low rate of injury associated with robbery and property crime. In general, the safest course of action to reduce victim injury in regard to property offenders appears to be to encourage and facilitate the escape of the offender. Recent moves in Australia that seek to arm the potential victim are more likely to result in encouraging victims to confront offenders, leading to preventable injuries in both victims and offenders.



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