Hoodie or goodie?

The link between violent victimisation
and offending in young people:
a research report

Victim Support
Helping people cope with crime

Hoodie or goodie? The link between violent victimisation and offending in young people

September 2007
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Executive summary

Introduction

Victim Support commissioned BMRB Social Research to carry out a research project to explore the link between violent victimisation and offending behaviour in young people. Professor Wikström of Cambridge University, a consultant on the project, commented on the research findings. The research was commissioned as part of Victim Support's Young Victims Project.

The aim of the research was to explore the following questions:

- Is there a link between violent victimisation and offending in young people?
- What are the underlying risk factors and protective factors for violent offending and victimisation?
- What are the pathways and processes between violent victimisation and offending?
- What interventions are needed to prevent future violent offending and victimisation?

Methodology

The research methodology was qualitative in nature and involved four stages.

- **Stage one:** a literature review was carried out to explore previous research on the subject.

- **Stage two:** a workshop with practitioners was held to explore the views and experiences of practitioners about the link between victimisation and offending in young people.

- **Stage three:** research with young people consisted of in-depth interviews with a group of 46 individuals, designed to get their views. These young people were:
  - either violent offenders, victims of violence[1] or both offenders and victims
  - aged between 14 and 18
  - of different ethnic backgrounds.

  They had either been involved in or affected by a range of types of violence, including assault, wounding and robbery.

- **Stage four:** a workshop with policy-makers and practitioners was held to discuss the implications of the research findings for service provision.

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[1] In this research, the definition of violence used to screen participants was; "the use of force or violence against the person, such as hitting with fists, kicking, pushing, throwing something at them, or using a weapon against them".

Literature review

The literature review suggested that a link between victimisation and offending did exist. It also suggested that certain aspects of a young person's lifestyle and disposition were likely to increase their chances of becoming a victim of crime and an offender[2]. These included:

- spending time with delinquent peers
- being exposed to violent crime in the local area
- weak social networks
- being part of a gang
- low school attendance
- a tendency to engage in risky behaviour.

Factors which may protect young people from being involved in crime as a victim and/or an offender included:

- a positive relationship with family, including clear boundaries
- a positive attitude to school.

Gender, social class and ethnicity have been found to have less influence on the relationship between offending and victimisation.

It is important to note that most of the correlating and predicting factors identified did not necessarily cause victimisation and offending. Most identified 'risk factors' were probably only markers or symptoms.

The research offered some potential explanations of the nature of the relationship between victimisation and offending. These included:

- the interchangeable role of victim and offender
- retaliation
- self-protection.

Wikström suggests that we need to better analyse the links between distant causes (such as child-rearing techniques and informal social control processes, ie things which control people's behaviour, like their values and beliefs, and the disapproval of people who are important to them) and direct causes (such as temptation and moral judgements).

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[2] Risk factors are aspects of a person's disposition or lifestyle that put them at a greater risk of being a victim of crime and/or an offender. Protective factors, on the other hand, are aspects of a young person's lifestyle or disposition that reduce the likelihood of them being a victim of crime and/or an offender. Protective factors are thought to enhance resilience to victimisation and/or offending, and may serve to counterbalance risk factors. Risk and protective factors are not necessarily causal factors; that is, they do not necessarily cause or prevent victimisation or offending. Instead, they merely identify the potential for victimisation or offending experiences.

The findings

Risk and protective factors

In the interview with young people, the researchers explored aspects of their lives which could potentially have affected whether the young person was an offender and/or a victim. Risk and protective factors were analysed among young people who fell into three categories:

- those who had committed a violent offence but were not victims of violence
- those who had been both a victim of violence and had committed a violent offence
- those who were a victim of violence but had not committed violence themselves.

Young people who had carried out violence but had not been victims of violence

These young people described similar life factors to those who had been both a victim of violence and an offender. The factors included a poor relationship with parents, friends who engage in risky activities and negative role models. Those who had been a violent offender but not a victim of violence generally had negative attitudes towards the police.

Young people who had been both victim and offender

Key factors evident in this group of young people included: poor relationships with parents; playing truant; being excluded from school or moving to a specialised behaviour management school; friends who engage in risky activities without adult supervision; and negative role models. Young people in this group said that they had been bullied and had both positive and negative views of the police.

Young people who had been victims but not violent offenders

This group of young people described quite different life factors to the offender groups. They appeared to have experienced several factors that previous research had identified as protective factors (and which were not experienced by the offender groups). These included: engaging in structured activities with adult supervision; having positive role models; taking deliberate action to avoid getting involved in violence; and having positive attitudes towards the police. Like those who had been both a victim and offender of violence, however, this group tended to have been victims of bullying [3].

All three groups said that there were high levels of crime in their neighbourhood and thought of their friends as a source of protection.

Gender and ethnicity did not appear to have had an impact on risk and protective factors experienced by young people involved in crime, whether as victims or as offenders. The research suggested that age had an effect on the attitudes of young people, with greater reluctance to be involved in crime as they grew older.

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[3] Where participants claimed to have been a victim of bullying, this was in some cases verbal abuse – in others it included physical abuse. If participants had been a victim of physical bullying, they were recorded as victims of violence.

Pathways and processes

The young people we interviewed generally felt that there was a link between violent victimisation and violent offending. The interviews suggested that the presence of certain risk factors in a young person's life made the victim-offender link more likely.

Pathways from victimisation to offending

Three pathways were thought to explain how victimisation can lead to offending. They were:
- retaliatory violence
- displaced retaliation carried out by the victim
- the victim befriending offenders.

The interviewees pointed out that violence committed by a victim in response to their experience was not always carried out against their attacker. It could instead be displaced on to another victim. The retaliatory violence and displaced retaliation pathways were thought to be more likely to occur if the initial victim was exposed to other risk factors.

These other risk factors were related to the victim's perceptions and attitudes. They included having the view that:
- the only way to deal with anger was through violence
- retaliatory violence was acceptable behaviour
- involvement of the police would be ineffective or socially unacceptable
- the victim would gain respect and protect themselves from further victimisation if they committed violence.

The third suggested pathway between victimisation and offending involved a victim of violence becoming friends with violent offenders. As a result, they could be influenced to commit violent offences themselves. Again, this pathway was considered more likely if other risk factors were present in the victim's life. These included a victim feeling socially isolated, and believing that violent offenders could protect them from further victimisation.

Pathways from offending to victimisation

Two pathways were thought to explain how offending can lead to victimisation. These were retaliatory violence by the victim, and lack of protection for the offender from adults in authority.

An offender was considered more likely to become a victim of retaliatory violence if their victim had certain views and attitudes. These were seen as risk factors and were the same as those in the retaliation and displaced retaliation pathways from victimisation to offending. They included the victim believing that retaliatory violence was acceptable behaviour.

Violent offenders were considered less likely to be protected by adults in authority because of negative attitudes towards them as offenders. This lack of protection was thought to make these offenders more vulnerable to becoming a victim of violence themselves. Whether or not this pathway occurred was thought to depend on how the offender felt adults in authority saw them.

Support

Key features of support identified by young people were:

- having someone to talk to
- impartiality
- a non-authoritarian approach
- promotion of self-confidence
- practical ideas
- parental guidance
- opportunities for recreation.

Young people also thought that raising awareness of the services available would encourage them to engage more with support.

Practitioners identified further important features of support that they felt could help to break the link between violent victimisation and offending in young people. These included the use of alternative terminology instead of labels such as 'victim' and 'offender', and encouraging young people to see the police as directly accessible.

Conclusion

The research suggests a number of recommendations that policy-makers and practitioners should explore, together with young people, to inform the development of effective policies and services to meet their needs.

These are:

- national provision of services that offer young people:
  - someone impartial and non-authoritarian to talk to
  - practical strategies for dealing with their emotions
  - opportunities to increase their self-esteem
- making sure that both young victims and offenders have equal access to effective support services
- making sure that they are aware of the services available
- the expansion of initiatives to build young people's confidence in adult authority figures, particularly in relation to reporting crime and seeking support
- more opportunities for young people to engage in structured and supervised social activities
- greater provision of physical recreation for young people
- education and awareness-raising to help young people identify less 'risky' ways to stay safe
- education and awareness-raising to discourage the perception that retaliatory violence is an acceptable way of responding to a crime
- engaging parents and carers of young people in breaking the cycle of victimisation and offending
- making sure that policy and practice responses to young people reflect the fact that victims and offenders are often one and the same.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Victim Support commissioned BMRB Social Research to carry out a research project to explore the link between being a victim of violence and offending behaviour in young people. Professor Wikström of Cambridge University, a consultant on the project, commented on the research findings. The research was commissioned as part of Victim Support's Young Victims Project.

A growing body of research evidence suggests that there is a relationship between offending and victimisation. The link has been specifically identified among young people who are at risk of both offending and victimisation. The link is particularly prominent in relation to violent victimisation and offending. The implication is that young victims and violent offenders are often the same group of people.

Victim Support wanted to understand in more detail the process through which young people become vulnerable to violent victimisation or offending. This required the risk factors and protective factors to be explored, as well as potential pathways and processes that may be involved in the link.

1.2 Aims and objectives of the research

The aim of the research was to explore in more depth the nature of the relationship between violent victimisation and offending in young people. The research also looked at views on the role of support interventions to help reduce the risk of later offending of young victims.

Specifically, the research aimed to explore the following questions:
- Is there a link between violent victimisation and offending among young people?
- What are the underlying risk factors and protective factors for violent offending and victimisation?
- What are the pathways and processes between violent victimisation and offending?
- What interventions are needed to prevent future violent offending and victimisation?

Outcomes of the research will include an improved understanding of young people's responses to victimisation and offending. This will help to inform the development of effective services by agencies that work with young people affected by crime, including Victim Support.

2 Method

2.1 Research design

The research project was qualitative in nature and involved consulting with practitioners, policy-makers and young people. The methodology included four key stages, summarised below.

Project initiation

Stage 1
Literature overview

Stage 2
Workshop with practitioners

Stage 3
In-depth interviews with young people

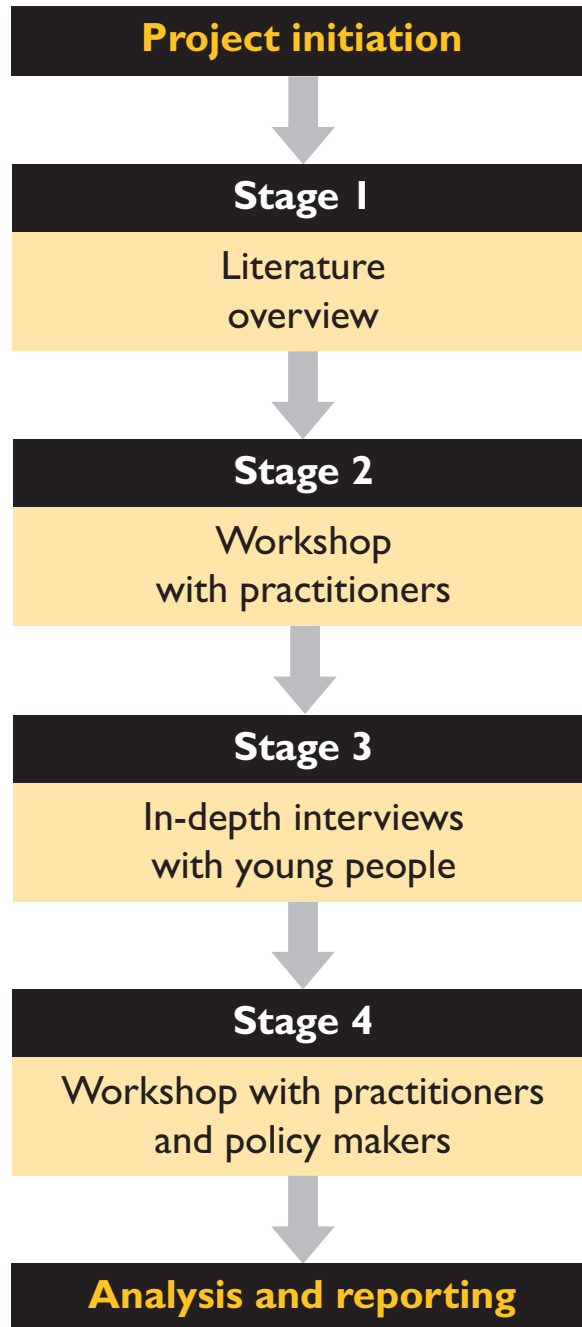| Stage 4 |
| :---: |
| Workshop with practitioners and policy makers |

Analysis and reporting

Diagram 1: research methodology

Each stage is described in more detail opposite.

Stage one: literature overview

Stage one involved reviewing relevant research. This was to make sure that the project built on previous knowledge. Literature reviewed included academic studies, government research publications and literature produced by young people's charities and organisations. An overview of this literature is given in chapter 3 of this report.

Stage two: workshop with practitioners

Stage two involved a workshop with practitioners. Participants included representatives from local Victim Support branches, youth offending teams, secure estates (secure training centres, secure children's homes and young offender institutions) and the YMCA. Findings from the literature review were presented to stimulate discussion of the possible relationship between victimisation and offending among the young people the practitioners worked with. The discussion included an exploration of views about risk and protective factors that potentially influence a young person's involvement in crime. The workshop was also an opportunity to build relationships with practitioners who could help the research team find young people to interview.

Stage three: in-depth interviews with young people

Stage three involved in-depth interviews with 46 14–18 year olds with a range of experiences. The literature review and practitioners' workshop informed decisions about the appropriate sample group to use for the interviews with young people. The literature review and practitioners' workshop also suggested various pathways between offending and victimisation that could be explored with young people. Consequently, quotas were set to include participants who had been:

- a victim but not an offender
- an offender but not a victim
- a victim and then an offender
- an offender and then a victim or
- both a victim and an offender, but where it was unclear which incident came first, or whether they were involved in the incident as a victim or as an offender.

To examine how the seriousness of violence might have affected the link, the group included quotas for violence that resulted in a more serious injury (classified as wounding), and violence that did not result in injury or where there was a less serious injury (classified as assault). A quota was also set for victims and offenders of robbery. These definitions of violence were taken from the British Crime Survey, and were based on the victim's perception of the events rather than the definition of the crime given at prosecution or arrest.

The literature overview did not indicate that location had a significant impact on the link between victimisation and offending. Geographical area was therefore not a prioritised quota; however, the sample was still selected to ensure a spread of young people from a range of areas. Participants from areas such as Exeter and Peterborough were included to give some representation of areas outside the capital. But the majority of the sample was from inner and outer London. The sample included young men and women and a range of ethnic groups was reflected.

The interview group was recruited through practitioners from a range of services. These included local Victim Support branches, youth offending teams, secure estates, YMCA branches and other youth groups such as the Prince's Trust. Participants were given a £10 high street gift voucher to thank them for taking part.

The interviews were carried out by experienced qualitative researchers from BMRB. They used a topic guide to shape the discussions, but allowed participants plenty of opportunities to raise other relevant issues. (See appendix E for an outline of the topic guide used.)

Enabling tools were used during the interviews with young people, such as the River of Life technique. This involved participants drawing a line representing different stages in their lives, with higher points on the line signifying more positive incidents, and lower points on the line showing times which were difficult or upsetting. This technique helped the researcher and young person to have a focus when discussing different events, risk factors and timescales. Vignettes were also used in the topic guide. These were designed to allow participants to express their views on a hypothetical situation without having to disclose personal information about their own lives. Such tools were designed to encourage young people to talk about their views without feeling overly self-conscious or inhibited.

The interviews lasted about 45 minutes, depending on the young person's concentration level.

Additional information on the sample profile of participants and analysis of interview transcriptions can be found in appendices B and C.

Stage four: workshop with practitioners and policy-makers

After the interviews with young people, a second workshop was held with practitioners who attended the first workshop and policy-makers from organisations such as the Youth Justice Board. The aim of this second workshop was to discuss how findings from the research could inform service provision to help young people involved in crime, as victims or offenders.

## 2.2   Analysis

This report discusses findings from:
- the interviews with young people
- the workshops with practitioners and policy-makers.

The findings from the interviews were analysed by splitting participants into three groups based on their experiences of crime. The three groups were:
- young people who were offenders but not victims
- those who were victims but not offenders
- those who were both victims and offenders.

This was done to examine how, if at all, aspects of the lives of young people who were both offenders and victims of violence differed from those of young people who had not experienced **both** victimisation and offending.

3 Literature review
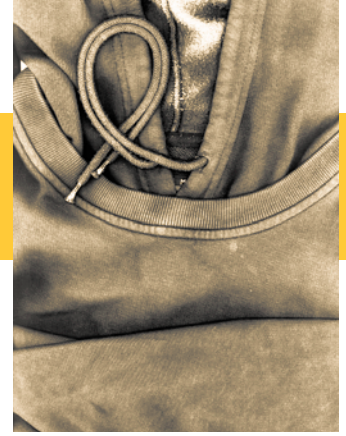
Most criminological work involving young people considers young victims separately from young offenders. Increasingly, however, research has indicated that young victims and offenders are influenced by the same lifestyle and personal characteristics, and are often the same people. Studies have suggested a strong correlation between young people's involvement in violence as victims and as offenders.

3.1 The link between adolescent victimisation and offending

Various studies have found that victims of crime have an increased likelihood of committing an offence, and that offenders are more likely to be victimised. Sampson and Lauritsen (1990) found that offending activity, whether violent or minor delinquency, directly increased the risk of personal victimisation. Similarly, Deadman and MacDonald (2003) found that people who admitted to some type of offending stood a greater chance of being a victim. Smith's (2004) Edinburgh study suggested that there was a tendency for people who were offenders to have been victims too and a tendency for victims to also have been offenders[4].

Violent victimisation and offending

Many studies point to a particularly strong correlation between violent offending and violent victimisation – for example, Wikström and Butterworth (2006). Violent offenders have been found to be as much as three times more likely to have been victims of assault than non-offenders (Sampson and Lauritsen, 1990). Rivara et al (1995) looked at the criminal records of males aged 10 to 24 years old treated in accident and emergency departments for assault-related injuries. They found that convictions for wounding were higher among assaulted patients than among patients whose injuries had a non-violent cause.

3.2 Risk and protective factors for victimisation and offending

Previous research highlights risk and protective factors present in young victims and offenders. This section gives an overview of the risk and protective factors found to be influential and those that have less of an impact in the link between victimisation and offending.

Risk factors

Lifestyle involving contact with offenders
The lifestyle-routine activity theory suggested that differential risks of victimisation were partly due to the victim's lifestyle, because this affected a person's exposure to potential offenders (Hindelang et al, 1978). The theory suggested that people were at a higher risk of victimisation when they came into contact with demographic groups which contained a disproportionate number of offenders.

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[4] Please see appendix G for references for this section.

These findings are in agreement with Smith's (2004) Edinburgh study. This found that getting involved in risky activities or situations, such as fare dodging and shoplifting, was the most important factor in explaining the link between victimisation and offending.

Living in an area with high levels of crime and violence
Although studies have generally found that neighbourhood deprivation and urbanity do not affect crime and delinquency, Sampson and Lauritsen (1990) found that living in a high violence area doubled the risk of being victimised. DuRant et al (1994) found that there was a link between previous exposure to violence and self-reported use of violence by black adolescents. This study also looked at age, mental health problems, and other variables and found that previous exposure to violence and victimisation was the strongest predictor of use of violence by young people.

Weak social bonds
Wikström and Butterworth (2006) found that young people's social situation (represented by family and school bonds and level of monitoring by parents) was strongly related to their likelihood and frequency of offending. Smith (2004) suggested that weak social networks were associated with offending and would also make it harder for victims to protect themselves. However, this study found that parental monitoring and parental conflict had no effect on the offending and victimisation link.

Having delinquent peers has been found to be associated with violent victimisation, even when variables such as race, gender, family structure, family income, and neighbourhood characteristics were taken into account (Lauritsen et al, 1991).

Being a member of a gang
It has been suggested that young people see gangs as a form of protection and solidarity. A key finding of a study among deprived neighbourhoods in Glasgow was the role of the peer group as a way for young people to keep safe when, for example, going to risky places in groups. However, it also found that moving in groups for safety could be interpreted by adults or other children as threatening (Seaman et al, 2006).

Low school attendance
Hindelang (1978) found the likelihood of personal victimisation among 16 to 19 year-old males who were not in school was nearly three times the overall likelihood of personal victimisation across eight US cities. More recently, the Mori Youth Survey 2004 found that excluded young people were more likely than young people attending mainstream schools to be victims of an offence or bullying, and also had far higher rates of offending.

High-risk personal characteristics
Smith (2004) found that personal characteristics such as risk-taking, low self-esteem, aggressiveness and aggressive demeanour may have given rise to both offending and victimisation, His Edinburgh study found that a risk-taking personality was associated with both victimisation and offending but more strongly with offending. Singer (1981) found that victims and offenders responded to perceived situations of physical or psychological threat in similar ways.

Living in care or foster care

Wikström and Butterworth (2006) found that young people living in foster care or care tended to have weaker social bonds, self control and 'pro-social values' than other young people, although the differences were not great. Such aspects of a young person's disposition were found to be related to the likelihood that a young person would be involved in crime.

Protective factors

Positive relationship with family

Lauritsen et al (1991) reported that adolescents who spent more time with their family were less likely to become victims of aggressive behaviour. Beinart et al (2005) identified various aspects of a young person's relationship with their family which seemed to reduce the risk of problem behaviour, including involvement in crime. These included a young person feeling supported by their parents, having clear rules set at home and having parents who showed they were proud of their child and that they thought it would be wrong of their child to engage in delinquent behaviour.

Positive attitudes to school

Adolescents who say that they are satisfied with school activities have been found to be less likely to report being a victim of violence (Lauritsen, Laub and Sampson, 1992). Beinart et al (2005) suggested aspects of a young person's attitude to school that may protect them from the risk of involvement in crime as an offender. These attitudes included: thinking that their school set and enforced clear rules; feeling that schoolwork was very important for their future; and recognising opportunities to take part in class and extra-curricular activities.

Less influential factors in the relationship between victimisation and offending

Gender

Wikström and Butterworth (2006) found that gender was only a modest predictor of offending behaviour. They argued that this could be accounted for by the fact that females tend to have stronger protective factors than males. While risk and protective factors associated with gender could explain why males commit more crimes overall than females, they suggested that an individual's gender alone cannot explain why he or she commits a crime (ie it cannot be a cause of crime).

Social class

Studies have suggested that social class is unimportant in explaining the link between victimisation and offending. However, Wikström and Butterworth (2006) found that although social class did not have a strong direct influence on adolescent offending and victimisation, it did have an effect on other risk-protective factors. For example, young people from upper and middle class families tend to have stronger school bonds, self-control and levels of shaming.

Ethnic background

Wikström and Butterworth (2006) found that ethnic background did not have much of an impact on offending, apart from Asian girls. As a group, they had a substantially lower rate of offending and victimisation and tended to have much stronger individual protective factors than others.

Neighbourhood deprivation

Smith (2004) found that living in deprived neighbourhoods did not explain the link between victimisation and offending. Wood (2005) also found that local area, in terms of relative deprivation or level of urbanity, was not a significant predictor of whether or not someone would be a victim of personal crime.

3.3   Potential pathways and processes

As discussed above, we have extensive knowledge of risk factors which correlate with young people's offending and victimisation. However, these correlates and predictors did not necessarily cause victimisation and offending in the studies described. In fact, most 'risk factors' identified were probably only markers or symptoms. This section considers some of the ways in which the relationship between victimisation and offending could work.

Interchangeable roles

Smith (2004) suggested that in a confrontation between two people, a different individual might have the upper hand at different times. This means that the offender and victim roles can be reversed. Chance, rather than deliberate action or intent, can often determine who will be the victim and who will be legally defined as the offender. Victim and offender roles are therefore argued to be interchangeable, particularly in the case of brawls and disputes. Fattah (1994) argues that the frequency with which some individuals become involved in violent situations will affect their chances of becoming both a victim and an offender.

Retaliation

Smith (2004) suggests that offenders are also vulnerable to retaliation. A link between victimisation and offending could therefore be explained by a desire to retaliate. Similarly, Fattah (1994) suggests that violent offending may increase someone's chances of becoming a victim of retaliatory violence. It is claimed that gratuitous violence is the exception rather than the rule, and that violence in most instances is an expression of a grievance, a response to an attack, injury or provocation.

Direct and distant causes

Wikström claims that many studies explore factors that are potential 'causes of the causes', rather than the direct causes of crime, such as temptation and moral judgements (Wikström and Butterworth). These indirect causes include things such as such as child-rearing techniques and informal social control processes. He suggests that we need to better analyse the links between distant (or indirect) and direct causes to improve our understanding of how, for example, situational crime prevention and developmental and social crime prevention techniques may be best integrated into a comprehensive strategy of crime prevention.

Self-protection due to low social positioning of young people

Whether or not a victim pursues restoration of justice by offending might depend on their perception of their own social position. Brook uses Anderson et al's (1994) reference to the 'vicious circle of young people and crime' to explain that, when young people do not trust the police, they are likely to develop their own strategies for coping with crime. Some of these strategies may involve them in offending, such as carrying weapons for protection. Other strategies may reinforce their invisibility, for example 'not grassing'. Consequently, the cycle of indifference and invisibility both reinforces young people's vulnerability and makes it more likely that they will be characterised as offenders.

Prejudging young people with the status 'offender' made it harder for them to get the protection they need, making them more likely to be a victim but less likely to have received appropriate support. A study by Katz et al (2003) found that many young people took matters into their own hands and carried weapons as a security measure.

3.4   Conclusion

Studies have suggested that a link between victimisation and offending does exist, and that the link works in both directions, ie victimisation predicts offending and vice versa. A particularly strong link has been found to exist between offending and victimisation in relation to violent crime. The research suggests that certain aspects of a young person's lifestyle and disposition increase their likelihood of being a victim of crime and an offender. These include:

- spending time with delinquent peers
- being exposed to violent crime in the local area
- weak social networks
- being part of a gang
- low school attendance
- a tendency to engage in risky behaviour.

Aspects of a young person's lifestyle and disposition which may protect them from being involved in crime as a victim and/or an offender include:

- a positive relationship with family, including clear boundaries
- a positive attitude to school.

Gender, social class and ethnicity have been found to have less influence on the relationship between offending and victimisation. The research suggests certain risk factors that correlate with young people's offending and victimisation. However, such correlates and predictors are not necessarily causes, and most identified 'risk factors' could be only markers or symptoms.

We know less about the nature of the relationship between victimisation and offending. Potential explanations include:

- the interchangeable roles of victim and offender
- retaliation
- self-protection.

To understand this link better, it would help to explore the presence of a range of suggested risk and protective factors in young people who have offended and been victims of violent crime. Wikström also suggests that we need to better analyse the links between distant causes and direct causes.

The findings

4   Risk and protective factors

In the interviews with young people, the researchers explored aspects of their lives which could have affected whether the young person was an offender and/or a victim of violence. Factors covered were based on those highlighted in the literature review, namely:

- experiences of school or education
- relationships with family and friends
- attitudes towards the police
- the type of neighbourhood lived in
- influences on their behaviour and
- attitudes.

The relationship between a participant's gender and ethnicity and their involvement in crime were also explored.

This chapter begins by looking at common factors in the lives of young people who were offenders but not victims of violence, then those who had been a victim but not an offender. It then explores findings from the group of young people who had been both offenders and victims of violence. Comparisons between the three groups are drawn out in each section and the chapter concludes with an overall comparison of the three groups.

4.1   Young people who were offenders but not victims

The researchers explored risk and protective factors in the following areas with young people who had been offenders but not victims of violence.

School and education

The group of young people who had offended but not been victims of violence reported similar risk factors in relation to their experiences of school and education to those who had been both offenders and victims of violence. This included experiences of being bullied, playing truant from school, being excluded due to disruptive or violent behaviour, and moving to alternative education such as special needs or behaviour management schools. This group said that disruption in their home lives had led to disruption in their education when moving between different secondary schools.

Relationship with parents

Young people who had offended but not been victims said that their relationships with a parent or parent figure had been damaged. This included reports of violence between parents, physical abuse from a parent, or the death or absence of a parent.

Friends and social activities

In terms of their friends and social activities, young people who had been offenders but not victims of violence described similar experiences to those who had been victims but not offenders. Participants reported a lack of trust in their friends. Their friends tended to play truant or be excluded from school, and to be older than the participant. Engagement in delinquent behaviour without adult supervision was also reported.

However, as among all three groups, friends were felt to be a source of protection from victimisation. For this reason, participants spent time with older children who were considered better able to protect them. These older children who were seen as providing protection also tended to be involved in crime, which suggested that this perceived protective factor could perhaps act as a risk factor.

Neighbourhood

Young people who had offended but not been victims of violence described aspects of their local area which included high levels of violent crime, drug use, gang warfare, unemployment and low income families. Such risk factors led participants to avoid certain areas that they felt were too dangerous. A lack of recreational facilities in the local area was also reported by this group.

Attitudes towards the police

Attitudes towards the police appeared to be based on an individual's experience of contact with the police. Young people who had offended but not been victims of violence tended to display negative attitudes towards the police, including a lack of faith and trust in them. This group felt that they were singled out for unfair treatment by the police because of their offender status.

> "I think they used to pick on us from the area, and put us in the bin.
> They used to lift us up and put us in the bin."
> *Male, 14, offender but not victim*

In circumstances where someone was known to the police as an offender, participants thought that the police would do less to help them if that person became a victim of crime.

> "If you haven't done anything before to do with crime, they will
> be more likely to help you than if you have."
> *Female, 16, offender but not victim*

Young people who had offended but not been a victim of violence also behaved according to a perceived 'code of conduct' that prevented them from reporting a crime to the police ('grassing').

Influences on behaviour

Like those who had offended and been victims of violence, young people who had offended but not been victims of violence tended to say that they had negative role models who encouraged violent behaviour. The absence of a parent in a young person's life was linked to difficult relationships with parents or to problems with living in the care system. For example, one participant explained that the boundaries imposed by her care home did not affect her behaviour, as the punishments given out were not considered sufficiently serious to be effective.

"I don't really have to [be in at a reasonable time]. I stayed out late some nights … obviously they can say you will get punished but they can't really punish you there. They say be in at 10 pm but you don't have to actually, do you. You can't get done for it … [you might] have money knocked off your incentive money, so obviously you wouldn't get it for a night."

Female, 14, offender but not victim

4.2 Young people who were victims of violence but not offenders

Risk and protective factors in the following areas were explored with young people who had been victims of violence, but not offenders.

School and education

Young people who had not offended but had been victims of violence talked about experiences of bullying at school, and a lack of discipline enforced by teachers. This leniency was felt to lead to low levels of safety in school, and participants in this group said that they worried about the threat of violence in school.

"The security in our school is so bad. They leave the gates open so you are constantly having people that don't even go to our school coming in, sitting down and having their lunch. There are people who are excluded, even young offenders. All the time we get gangs of boys coming in, and it is so bad because we get people climbing over the fences. The other day, two boys climbed over and the teacher got punched in the face. They don't phone the police."

Female, 16, victim but not offender

Relationship with parents

Young people who were victims but not offenders described positive aspects of their relationship with their family, including:

- living with at least one parent
- having a good relationship with their parent(s)
- feeling that they could talk to their parent(s) about their problems.

This supports Beinart et al's (2005) research which suggests that children who feel supported by their parents are less likely to engage in delinquent behaviour.

Friends and social activities

Young people who had been victims but not offenders said that they took part in structured and supervised activities with friends, such as playing sport or being involved in drama or dancing groups. This group tended to be resistant to the idea of being part of a gang and recognised the risks of spending time with the 'wrong people'.

"I see them on the street and I just say hello, cool and just walk on. I won't be like 'oh come let's roll'
or 'come let's walk together' … because if you get involved with them people …
[the] next crew sees you … they assume you're in that crew and then you
get [beaten] up. So you just don't get involved really."
Male, 17, victim but not offender

Neighbourhood

Similar to the other two groups, those who had been victims but not offenders reported violent crime, drug use, gang warfare and high unemployment in their local areas. Such aspects of their neighbourhood led participants to avoid certain areas they considered dangerous.

"It's not safe, the people round here … for years, they chase my friend on bikes with knives.
They've tried to attack me."
Male, 14, victim but not offender

A lack of recreational facilities in the local area was also reported by young people in this group.

Attitudes towards the police

Young people who were victims but not offenders generally held positive views of the police, who had helped them as victims of crime. They considered it worthwhile to report victimisation to the police. In cases where police had not solved the crime that had affected them, victims generally understood the limitations on the power of the police to get justice.

"It is not all the police's fault. It is because the law has become so stupid that the offender has more
rights over … the real victim. Police officers are tied, their hands are tied because of
how many laws there are saying they can't do this, can't do that."
Male, 14, victim not offender

Influences on behaviour

Young people who had been victims of violence but not offenders said that their role models had influenced their behaviour in a positive way.
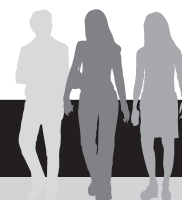
Practitioners' views

The presence of a male role model in a young person's life was thought to be important in helping young people avoid involvement in crime, particularly for boys. A male role model was considered important to teach boys how a man can achieve status in a community without resorting to crime.

"We have a male worker on our project and it enables them to actually see a male that has got
some standing in the community and learn that you don't have to go down that [criminal] route."
Practitioner

Section 6.6 discusses in more detail how positive parental guidance was thought to help prevent victims from becoming involved in offending.

Attitudes

Those who were victims but not offenders described taking deliberate action to avoid getting into trouble. An example of such action was dissociating themselves from other young people who were involved in aggressive behaviour.

> "People come just to fight. It was people that we knew, well what we used to see around. [They would] start fights, and we used to get bored with it so we just used to leave them."
>
> *Female, 14, victim but not offender*

This supports findings from Smith's Edinburgh study (2004) which suggested that attitudes and behaviour such as risk-taking and aggressiveness were associated more strongly with offending than with victimisation.

4.3 Young people who were both victims and offenders of violence

School and education

In terms of school and education, those who had been both a victim and offender of violence reported various factors in their lives. These included:

- being bullied
- playing truant from school
- being excluded due to disruptive or violent behaviour
- moving to alternative education, such as special needs or behaviour management schools.

This may be linked to the tendency of this group to experience disruption in their home lives when moving between different places to move into care, or to live with different foster families.

Practitioners' views

A young person's experience of school was considered to affect the risk that they would be both a victim of violent crime and an offender. Cases were reported of young victims of violent bullying who disengaged from school and stopped attending. Exclusion from school was thought, in some cases, to lead to a young person becoming involved in a new social group. These young people would also tend to be excluded from school and involved in offending behaviour. Resentment at being excluded from the academic and social benefits of school were thought to lead to offending behaviour in some young people.

Relationship with parents

Relationships with one or both parents or foster parents were generally reported to have been damaged in some way among the victim and offender group. Reasons for this included:

- violence between parents
- physical abuse from a parent or parent figure
- an alcoholic parent
- the death or absence of a parent (particularly the father) during childhood.

Young people linked these circumstances to feelings of rejection. In some cases this had led to them moving out of the family home, either becoming homeless or moving into the care system.

> "The thing that annoys me is the amount of times dad has had a fight with me. That's when the social workers got involved and partly why I got put in care, because [my parents] didn't like me or want me to stay here anyway."
>
> *Female, 14, victim and offender*

Practitioners' views

An unstable family background was thought to put a young person at greater risk of being both an offender and a victim. As part of a larger support network including family, school and friends, a lack of support from a young person's parents was thought to increase the risk that a young person would become involved in crime.

A stable family background that reinforced the importance of school was felt to be an important factor that could help a young victim cope with experiences of victimisation.

> "It really does depend on the family background. If you do have the stable background and you are made to go to school and you are made to study … and you have become a victim, I think it is very much a case of; it is bad what has happened but we have to move on, it shouldn't have happened to you."
>
> *Practitioner*

Friends and social activities

Generally those who had been both victims and offenders did not talk about experiences of friends and social activities that were highlighted as protective factors by the literature review. Phrases used to describe their friends included 'the wrong crowd'. Friends were said to play truant or be excluded from school, and be older than the participant. Social activities that they said they were involved in included:

- spending time on the streets or in other public spaces, such as shopping centres
- spending time with friends without adult supervision
- engaging in petty delinquency, drinking alcohol or smoking cannabis.

"Yes, a proper little street rat me. I was a little street kid. Our territory was an area called [x]. We used to hang around really, there was nothing to do, we [would] just sit there and talk, get up to trouble occasionally. We used to get tomatoes and eggs from the shops and then get chains and machetes. It was just a buzz … but we loved it. I suppose we directed it at people that owned the shop."
Female, 18, offender then victim

This supports Hindelang's lifestyle theory, which argues that those who spend time with people who engage in risky activities and are involved in crime are more likely to be involved in crime themselves. Smith's Edinburgh study also suggested that involvement in risky activities with delinquent peers was one of the most important factors for explaining the link between victimisation and offending (see section 3.2).

In our research the young people who had been both victims and offenders of violence also described a lack of trust in their friends.

"I don't really trust [my friends] that much but it's all right. If I need help … they are there. I could trust them but not too much. I don't give out too much info … I have got to keep some things to myself."
Male, 16, offender then victim

However, friends were felt to be a source of protection from victimisation. For example, participants considered themselves to be safer in the company of friends when walking home from school. The ability of friends to provide protection was given as a reason for spending time with older children, who were considered more capable of protecting themselves and others.

"I just hang around with the older ones. 'Cos the older ones look after you more than the younger ones."
Female, 16, victim then offender

However, older friends were said to engage in risky behaviour themselves. As a result, the perceived protective factor of association with older children could put young people at greater risk of being involved in crime – either as victims or offenders. This process is explored further in section 4.1.

Neighbourhood

The young people we interviewed who had been both offenders and victims of violence described high levels of violent crime, drug use, gang warfare, unemployment and low income families in their local neighbourhood. As well as fear of crime, a lack of recreational facilities in the local area made participants feel that there was 'nowhere to go' or 'nothing to do'.

Attitudes towards the police

Attitudes towards the police were reported to be generally based on the young person's experience of contact with the police, or the experiences of their friends or family. Those who were both offenders and victims of violence had been in contact with the police in both contexts, and held mixed views. Negative views included a lack of faith and trust in the police. Unfair treatment by police was described, when participants felt they had been 'picked on' unnecessarily.

> "It's like every five seconds they're around my area. If you walk and the police sees you they'll come up to you and they'll stop you and search you in front of everyone. [When I opened] my door the police stopped me outside my front door and searched me and made me properly embarrassed."
> *Male, 15, victim then offender*

Offenders thought that the police would do less to help them if they became a victim of crime if they were already known to the police as an offender. It was felt that an unwritten code of conduct prevented young people from reporting a crime to the police, unless it was a very serious incident. The effect of such attitudes towards the police on the victimisation-offender link is explored in section 5.1.

However, there were also views among young people who had been both offenders and victims of violence that it would be worth reporting a crime to the police. The police had helped them as victims of crime and so there were views that some police were 'good'.

Influences on behaviour

Those who had been both victims and offenders described negative role models and absent parents. Role models, such as parents, could encourage violent behaviour. For example, one participant who had been a victim and offender felt that the person he listened to most was his older brother. His brother told him not to commit crimes and get in trouble with the police. But the brother was also an offender and would commit crimes when out with the participant. The participant explained that even though he listened to his brother's advice, he wanted to join in with his brother when he went out to commit crimes. He felt that this meant that his brother's positive advice did not have much effect on his behaviour.

> "[My brother] tries to set a good example to me. He don't want me there when he's doing [robberies], he don't want me with him, he tells me go home … but I just want to be there."
> *Male, 17, offender then victim*

Other participants in this group referred to role models, including family members and boyfriends, who told them not to commit crimes but who had offended or displayed aggressive behaviour themselves. One participant said that the person he listened to the most was his mother, but that people were afraid of her because they knew she would act aggressively if they caused the family any trouble.

'"Cos if they say something to me or my brothers, or sister, that she don't like, I just advise anyone to run basically. [She is] especially nasty if someone says something that she don't like.''

Male, 15, victim then offender

Attitudes

Young people who had been both offenders and victims of violence tended to have a negative outlook on their lives. When asked to consider good things that had happened to them, they found it difficult to recall anything positive that had happened in their lives.

''I don't really remember any good things. Too many bad things have happened.''

Female, 14, victim then offender

''My whole life's been kind of bad really.''

Male, 17, offender then victim

4.4   Demographic factors

Risk and protective factors did not appear to differ with ethnic background and gender within the three groups of young people we interviewed. Although age was not found to influence factors such as experiences of school and relationships with parents, offenders did report a change in their attitudes as they grew older. Young people in the older age bracket (16-18) said they were developing more positive attitudes as they matured, showing greater reluctance to be involved in violence. The effect of this change in attitudes on the pathway between offending and victimisation is discussed in section 5.2.

4.5   Risk and protective factors: conclusion

This chapter has described the risk and protective factors found in each group of participants. These factors are summarised in diagram 2 on the following page, which shows that:

- Key factors evident among those who had been both offenders and victims of violence included:
  - a poor relationship with parents
  - playing truant
  - being excluded from school or moving to a specialised behaviour management school
  - friends who engage in risky activities without adult supervision
  - negative role models.
  Young people in this group also tended to have been bullied, have mixed views towards the police, and to describe high crime levels in their neighbourhood.

- Young people who had offended but not been a victim of violence shared many factors in common with those who had been both a victim and an offender, such as:
  - a poor relationship with parents
  - friends who engage in risky activities
  - negative role models.
  However, those who had offended but not been a victim tended not to show positive attitudes towards the police.

- Young people who had been victims but not offenders showed quite different factors to the offender groups. They reported experiences that previous research had found to be possible protective factors, including:
  - engaging in structured activities with adult supervision
  - having positive role models
  - taking deliberate action to avoid getting involved in violence
  - having positive attitudes towards the police.

  Like those who had been both offenders and victims of violence, however, this group tended to have been victims of bullying.

- All three groups reported high crime levels in their neighbourhood and thought of their friends as a source of protection from victimisation.

Offender and victim	Offender not victim	Victim not offender
Truant, have been excluded from school or attended specialised school	Truant, have been excluded from school or attended specialised school	
Poor relationship with parents	Poor relationship with parents	
Friends engage in risky activities without adult supervision	Friends engage in risky activities without adult supervision	Engage in structured activities with adult supervision
		Take deliberate action to avoid getting into trouble, eg avoiding certain groups of friends
Have negative role models	Have negative role models	Have positive role models
Have been bullied		Have been bullied
Mixed views on helpfulness of police	View police as unhelpful, unlikely to report victimisation to police	View police as helpful, likely to report victimisation to police
Think friends provide protection from victimisation	Think friends provide protection from victimisation	Think friends provide protection from victimisation
Report high crime levels in neighbourhood	Report high crime levels in neighbourhood	Report high crime levels in neighbourhood
Have negative outlook on life led so far		

Diagram 2: risk and protective factors

5 Pathways and processes

Generally, the young people we interviewed felt that there was a link between violent victimisation and violent offending. Although it was pointed out that some victims could simply be 'in the wrong place at the wrong time', it was felt that violent victimisation often led to violent offending and vice versa.

This chapter explores the participants' views on the nature of the relationship between violent victimisation and offending, considering why it exists and how it works. First, it discusses views on the potential pathways that may lead from victimisation to offending, then considers the pathways from offending to victimisation.

5.1 The pathways from violent victimisation to violent offending

The victim's desire to bring about justice by committing retaliatory violence, and the need to prevent further victimisation by associating with offenders, were viewed as key explanations for why victimisation can lead to violent offending. This section explores circumstances under which these pathways were considered to occur.

Retaliatory violence

A victim was thought to be likely to want to see justice brought to their attacker. However, it was recognised that the desire to retaliate did not lead all victims to commit retaliatory violence. It was suggested that the pathway from violent victimisation to committing a violent offence in retaliation depended on the co-existence of other factors in the victim's circumstances. These factors included:

- the desire to release feelings of anger through violence
- the desire to regain respect
- a belief that violence would bring about the most appropriate justice
- a perception that involving the police would not be effective or acceptable
- a lack of recognition of certain types of violence as criminal acts.

Each of these factors is discussed in detail below.

Releasing anger through violence

The experience of being a victim of violence was described as triggering feelings of anger that were difficult to manage. Committing violence was considered an effective way to release these painful emotions, causing a victim to become an offender. One participant explained how her feelings of anger after being victimised made her feel like committing violence.

"I was really upset and really angry. It built up so much it was like I was going to explode. I wasn't eating, I wasn't sleeping. I was really angry in myself and … if I hadn't had the support from my family and friends I would probably have [been violent] to someone else or one of my family members which I wouldn't have wanted to do."
Female, 15, victim but not offender

Participants who had committed retaliatory violence explained how it had reduced the pain they felt as victims.

"The pain of being called names and hit and stuff, that pain goes away when you do it to someone else."
Female, 14, victim then offender

"All this hatred that I had on my back sort of got released."
Female, 14, victim then offender

The victim's need to release anger was considered to be a reason why they might not report the incident to the police. It was felt that the act of committing violence allowed feelings of anger to be instantly released. If the police were involved, however, the victim would be unable to do this as they would be more likely to be caught if they committed retaliatory violence.

It was recognised that not all victims released their anger by committing violence. Whether or not they did so was thought to depend on whether the victim could learn to deal with their anger in other ways. A victim who had attended an anger management course and had not committed violence explained that she understood how victims who could not control their anger might be violent, but that she had learnt how to cope with such emotions.

"It is just basic temper. If you can control it, you can do anything. If you can't control, you just spaz out of control and just do things you would regret. I think it is just pressure – force. The one way I find to deal with it is just walk away."
Female, 17, victim but not offender

Even if a victim did not commit retaliatory violence after their first experience of victimisation, it was felt that repeated victimisation would cause anger to build up. One participant explained how this could make it increasingly difficult to resist the temptation to be violent, saying: "In the end, if people keep on being a victim, then they will snap".

Policy-makers' views

Policy-makers also held the view that a victim was more likely to commit retaliatory violence if they were unable to articulate their feelings in an alternative way. A victim who was better able to express themselves was thought to receive a positive response from adults in authority, who would better understand the young person's needs. Effective support interventions were therefore thought to be particularly accessible to more articulate young people. (See chapter 6 for implications for support service provision.)

Violence seen as fair and effective justice

Young people's views

Retaliatory violence committed by a victim was generally considered to be fair, particularly by participants who had offended. There was agreement with the principle **"if someone hit me, I'd hit them back"**. It was felt that a victim would want to make sure that their attacker knew how it felt to suffer in the same way.

> "If you are a victim of violence, you do use violence against other people, because you want them to feel how you feel."
> *Female, 17, victim then offender*

Participants had a keen sense of a system of justice that could be administered in place of punishment by the legal system.

> "If you do the crime, you pay the time, depending on if you pay the time in prison or if you pay the time by getting beaten up and robbed back. Whatever goes around comes around."
> *Male, 16, offender then victim*

Violent victimisation was also considered to be a more effective punishment for a violent offender than being arrested. Participants were asked to read a scenario about a victim who had violently attacked the perpetrator, and were asked to consider why the victim had used violence rather than involving the police. It was suggested that violence would be a worse punishment for the perpetrator to endure than being arrested, and therefore more desirable for the victim.

> "He wanted to deal with it his own way … because it'd cause the guy more pain and hurt than just getting arrested."
> *Female, 14, victim then offender*

Violence inflicted under certain circumstances was considered an appropriate way to administer justice rather than a 'crime'. If two opponents in a fight were equal in ability, it was considered a 'fair fight', contrasted with an 'unfair fight' in which a victim might be set upon without the ability to fight back. The need to involve the police was considered to be removed if violence was carried out in a 'fair fight'. This concept of a fair fight links to the idea of 'interchangeable roles' highlighted by Smith (2004), Braithwaite and Biles (1984) and Fattah (1994) (see section 3.3). This idea suggests that an individual's status may switch between offender and victim from time to time, depending on which opponent wins a particular fight.

> "[There is] no such thing as a violent person who becomes the victim. It's just fighting, and you're going to say the victim is the one that lost, but that might be the one that was starting it."
> *Male, 18, victim and offender*

Practitioners' views

Practitioners agreed that it was common for a young person to be a victim and an offender on separate occasions. This was felt to be due partly to the fact that young people tended to carry out violence against others in their peer group. Situations were identified where it was unclear whether a young person was a victim or an offender, such as when a young person committed violence as a result of being threatened with violence.

Violence seen as acceptable behaviour

The view of retaliatory violence as acceptable was considered to be an attitude learned from young people's role models. It was suggested that some people were brought up to consider retaliatory violence an appropriate way to punish a violent person.

"I've been brought up with like beatings just happening and it just seems natural, so I don't really see what's wrong with it really, or with other people doing it."

Female, 15, victim and offender

The influence of a young person's upbringing on their attitudes towards the use of violence was considered a key factor in determining whether or not a victim committed retaliatory violence.

'I'd put it down to upbringing. You are taught from the day you are born … like I had always been taught that you fight and everything and don't go down. At the end of the day if they pull out a weapon, walk away, but then come back and just deck them. If you have the opportunity to take the weapon off them and use it against them, use it."

Male, 17, offender then victim

The effect of attitudes learned through upbringing on breaking the pathway between victimisation and offending is explored in chapter 6.

Desire to regain respect

Victimisation was felt to damage both the victim's self-respect and respect from others, as it was thought to be a sign of weakness. A stigma was felt to be attached to a victim, which caused them to feel embarrassed about what had happened to them. It also concerned them that they were seen as a weak person. Retaliatory violence was considered to help victims regain the respect that was lost when they were victimised.

"[The young person in a scenario] felt embarrassed, embarrassed by the fact that he had his phone stolen from him and people might find out. His friends were probably egging him on to go and do something about it and that's probably why he went and had a fight. Maybe he's the sort of boy that it wouldn't happen to, and it did."

Female, 14, victim and offender

The term 'respect' was used to describe the attitude held towards a person who was strong enough to defend themselves. Establishing respect was therefore considered important for a victim because they needed to show that they could defend themselves in order to prevent further victimisation.

"As far as I am concerned, respect is everything. As a person from the streets I will tell you, if you don't have respect, you don't have nothing. If you are a victim you are someone that they will bully, you are someone that they'll beat up, you are someone that they will kill. If you have respect, people could be stronger, people could be faster, people could be more violent than you but they won't touch you because they respect you. When X beat him up he sent that message. He basically said don't do it again."

Male, 18, offender then victim

A lack of bravery was suggested as a reason why a victim might not retaliate using violence. This implies that violent retaliation was a sign of bravery that would prompt respect from a victim's peers.

"Victims don't do nothing. They are too scared … they haven't got the guts to do that to you."
Male, 18, offender then victim

For some victims, the initial respect gained by committing retaliatory violence was thought to provoke a desire to maintain that respect by continuing to commit violent acts. One victim of violent bullying explained how he had become 'addicted' to the esteem he gained by committing retaliatory violence.

"When I got bullied in Year 6, I thought I ain't getting bullied like that again. In Year 7, I had that one fight and then the bullies thought I was a big man and I liked everybody thinking I was a big man so I just kept on going. That's where my reputation started and I got kind of addicted to it."
Male, 14, victim then offender

Retaliation was also considered important for the victim's self-respect, as it would reassure them that they could do to someone else what their attacker did to them.

Practitioners' and policy-makers' views

Practitioners and policy-makers also felt that the experience of victimisation could cause a young victim to feel disempowered. They thought that young people felt the label 'victim' implied weakness. Victims who did not go on to offend were thought to have sufficient protective factors to help them to feel empowered, despite their victimisation experiences.

Practitioners also suggested that the occurrence of this pathway depended on the victim's perception of the type of behaviour that would gain respect from others. A victim was thought to be more likely to commit retaliatory violence if they felt they would gain respect by doing so.

Inappropriateness of police involvement

Young people's views

Victims were thought to be more likely to commit retaliatory violence if they thought that reporting an incident to the police would be ineffective and socially unacceptable.

As has been discussed in the chapter on risk and protective factors (chapter 4), a lack of faith in the ability of the police to bring an offender to justice was particularly found among young people who had offended.

"The police can't really do anything. If you give a witness statement they have to investigate it and if there ain't no evidence on CCTV, then the person's not going to jail. Well, the police ain't going to do nothing, so I should do something about it."
Male, 17, victim and offender

In addition to a lack of faith in the ability of the police to bring about justice, young people who were known to the police as offenders were considered unlikely to involve the police if they were

victimised. This was due to a lack of faith that the police would believe their side of the story.

Further to this, involving the police was not considered socially acceptable within the subculture of certain groups of young people. This was thought to cause victims to use retaliatory violence as a more acceptable form of justice instead. A fear of further victimisation if the perpetrator discovered that the victim had involved the police was thought to encourage victims to retaliate in this way.

> "If you tell the police and people find out, they'll come after you, so you deal with it on your own way, either beating the guy up, or doing something so the police can catch him but you're not being a snitch."
> *Male, 16, offender then victim*

It was explained that reporting victimisation to the police could be so dangerous that it could jeopardise the victim's life.

> "The police go to that person and they know you've snitched, they're coming back for you. People have died over snitching, that's how bad it is in our day and age."
> *Female, 16, victim and offender*

These negative attitudes towards the idea of involving the police are similar to those referred to in Anderson et al's (1994) 'vicious circle of young people and crime'. This idea suggests that, when young people lose their trust in the police, they develop their own strategies for coping with crime which may involve them in offending and reinforce their invisibility, such as 'not grassing'. Consequently, the cycle of indifference and invisibility to the police both reinforces young people's vulnerability and increases the risk that they will be characterised as offenders.

Young people who said they would report victimisation to the police suggested that they would ask a parent to do it on their behalf, rather than speaking directly to the police.

Practitioners' views

Practitioners also identified reluctance among young victims to report a crime to the police. This was considered to be due to either a fear of revenge attacks by the perpetrator, or a lack of faith that the police would successfully convict the perpetrator. Young victims were considered particularly likely to fear that contact with the police would be discovered by the offender under certain circumstances. These included situations when the victim and offender mixed in the same social circles or lived in the same area, which was reported to be a common aspect of crime between young people.

Practitioners also commented on the suggestion that young people who would contact the police would ask a parent to do so on their behalf. This was thought to highlight an assumption among young people that they could only ask for help from the police with the support of another adult in authority. Such a view was thought to be a risk factor for young victims, who would depend on the cooperative attitude of an adult to get help from the police. It was felt that some young people did not have a role model who believed it was worth reporting a crime to the police and was willing to act on the young person's behalf.

It was reported that the process of retaliation between victim and offender could be repeated over time, and so the level of violence was likely to escalate and become more serious.

"If people use violence, then people might get them back to get revenge, and then they get their mates to get them back again, and it can escalate 'til someone gets killed."
Female, 17, victim then offender

Displaced retaliation

Rather than committing violence against the perpetrator, a victim might be more likely to commit violence against someone else in response to being a victim. This type of violence was considered to be a form of retaliation, because the victim felt they had achieved a type of justice, even though the violence was not carried out against the original perpetrator.

"There is a saying that when you've been bullied, you bully to … cause other people pain that you've had … because the pain of being called names and hit and stuff goes away when you do it to someone else … even though it's a different person."
Female, 17, victim then offender

This was considered particularly likely to happen if the perpetrator was too powerful or strong for the victim to successfully attack, including in the case of physical abuse by a parent.

"'Cos a lot of fights I had were with my mum, I felt I was more likely to get into a fight … being at school all day. If someone started … when I was getting the violence at home, I thought **** it, I'm not taking this at school."
Male, 17, victim then offender

Risk factors that increased the likelihood of this pathway occurring were considered to be the same as those that influenced the retaliatory violence pathway where violence was committed against the perpetrator.

Association with violent offenders for protection

Befriending a perpetrator of violence was thought to be an alternative strategy adopted by victims to protect themselves from further victimisation. This was seen as another pathway between victimisation and offending, as it was felt that victims were likely to become involved in committing violent offences carried out by their new social group as they tried to get accepted.

Instances were reported of victims befriending the person who had committed violence against them in an attempt to prevent further victimisation.

"More often than not, you know, in school when you fight with someone they end up being your friends after. Because [the victim] figures if they can't beat you that they need to join you, they need to be with you. It's like that father figure."
Male, 18, offender then victim

To be accepted as a member of a violent gang, however, it was thought that a victim might have to commit a violent offence themselves.

> "If you're in a crew you have to have rep [ie reputation], you have to have done something to be in this group."
> *Male, 17, victim but not offender*

And once a victim had been accepted into the social group, they were felt to face pressure to commit further violent offences in order to maintain the respect of their peers. If they refused to be involved in violent activities, it was thought that they would risk losing the respect of others and even being violently attacked.

> "If [a victim] tells his friends he doesn't want to hang out with them, they might beat him up or do something to him, so he does the offences to get them to respect him more."
> *Male, 18, victim then offender*

As previously discussed, certain factors were thought to influence whether or not a victim decided to commit retaliatory violence. Similarly, whether or not a victim associated with perpetrators of violence was thought to depend on the co-existence of certain factors. These included a victim's experience of social isolation and their view that perpetrators of violence could protect them against violent victimisation.

Social isolation

The experience of victimisation was thought to make it difficult for some victims to make friends, particularly when they were victims of violent bullying. It was explained that potential friends of a victim of bullying might be scared of being bullied themselves through association with the victim. Victims were therefore considered likely to feel socially isolated and to lack confidence. So a victim of violence was thought to be more likely to accept offers of friendship from a perpetrator of violence.

Perception that violent offenders can provide protection from further victimisation

It was thought that, in some cases, victims saw perpetrators of violence as strong, and therefore able to offer protection from violent victimisation. The experience of victimisation was thought to leave victims with a fear of it happening again. This fear was seen to motivate victims to befriend authoritative and powerful people who could provide protection and who were often violent offenders themselves.

> "People want to join a gang so that, if they were in trouble, they could get back-up from the gang."
> *Male, 18, at risk of victimisation and offending*

Practitioners agreed that young people saw their social group as giving protection. This was particularly important to those who did not have a good relationship with their family. Young people were reported to become involved in violence between peer groups to protect members of their own group. Such conflict between peer groups was thought to lead to a young person's involvement in crime, both as an offender and a victim.

> "They won't go into a different area because they all know each other, these gangs. You don't go on their patch or there would be a war. They see it as the family as well, some of them, they are on full care orders, they have got no family. The only family is part of the gang. They are their brothers, they support each other and that is how they see it. Once you have come into that gang, you may be beating others up or you may be stabbing somebody else and then you become part of that gang."
>
> *Practitioner*

5.2 The pathways from violent offending to violent victimisation

The pathways from violent offending to violent victimisation were also recognised by participants, who made suggestions as to how they could occur. Violent offenders were thought to be at risk of victimisation if their victim decided to carry out retaliatory violence. Also, because of their offending history, violent offenders were considered unlikely to involve the police if they were threatened with violence. This in turn made them more vulnerable to victimisation.

Being a victim of retaliatory violence

The factors that lead a victim to commit retaliatory violence, discussed in the previous section, were felt to explain how a violent offender could become the victim of violent retaliation. If an offender committed violence, it was considered likely that sooner or later one of their victims would seek revenge by victimising the offender. It was pointed out that even if the victims themselves could not fight back, they might know someone older or stronger who could attack the perpetrator for them.

One participant explained how he deliberately distanced himself from other young people who committed violent offences in order to avoid becoming a victim himself. As a member of a gang, he explained that when another member committed violence against someone, the participant did not get involved, except by witnessing the attack, so that he would not be victimised by people seeking revenge.

It was considered possible that this pathway between offending and victimisation could occur over a long time period. An offender could continue to be at risk of retaliatory violence for many years after they committed an offence. Even if the offender stopped committing acts of violence as they matured, it was explained that they could still be at risk of retaliatory violence from a previous victim.

> "Perhaps people get into trouble when [they are] young, beating people up, and then when they've matured the [victim] hasn't and so they get their own back."
>
> *Female, 18, offender then victim*

Victimisation as a status symbol

Although considered rare, being a victim of retaliatory violence was thought to be seen as a status symbol by some offenders, because it demonstrated that the offender had committed violence. If a violent offender was a victim of many incidents of violence, it was viewed as a sign that they had carried out a lot of violence themselves. This increased the offender's status among their peers. Conversely, those who had not been a victim of violence were considered weak and were mocked by their peers.

> "The ones that have no violence [against them] at all, people call them pussies. They laugh at them. But the ones that have had the most violence towards them ... yes he's a top guy ... because at the same time they're the most violent ones themselves."
>
> *Male, 17, victim but not offender*

Barriers to receiving protection from adults in authority

Offenders who were at risk of violent victimisation were considered less likely to speak to an adult in authority for fear of getting into trouble over the violence they had committed. As discussed above, offenders also thought they would be taken less seriously by the police because of their previous involvement as an offender. This was considered to put an offender at greater risk of victimisation because they could not ask for the help and protection that adults in authority, such as police, teachers or parents, could provide. For example, a person who had violently bullied someone was considered more likely to rely on their friends to protect them from a revenge attack than to ask for help from an adult.

> "[A bully] doesn't want to tell her parents that she bullied first. That is not something you want to tell your parents. [She should] just keep her head down and take the beating and get on with her life because that's what she knows she deserves."
>
> *Male, 14, victim then offender*

Practitioners' and policy-makers' views

Practitioners and policy-makers also felt that labelling a young person as 'an offender' could make it more difficult for the young person to get support that they might need as a victim.

> "I think it may be based on an unspoken rule that says nobody will help me now because I'm always in trouble. They won't believe me ... it just means they're not going to ask for help."
>
> *Practitioner*

5.3   Pathways between victimisation and offending: conclusion

The suggested pathways between violent victimisation and violent offending are summarised in the diagrams below. The diagrams illustrate the risk factors that were thought to make the pathways more likely to occur. These risk factors were generally related to a young person's attitudes, perceptions and emotions.

Pathways from violent victimisation to violent offending

The three pathways that were thought to explain how victimisation can lead to offending are: retaliation; displaced retaliation; and befriending offenders. The retaliation pathways are summarised in diagram 3, and the befriending offenders link in diagram 4, below.
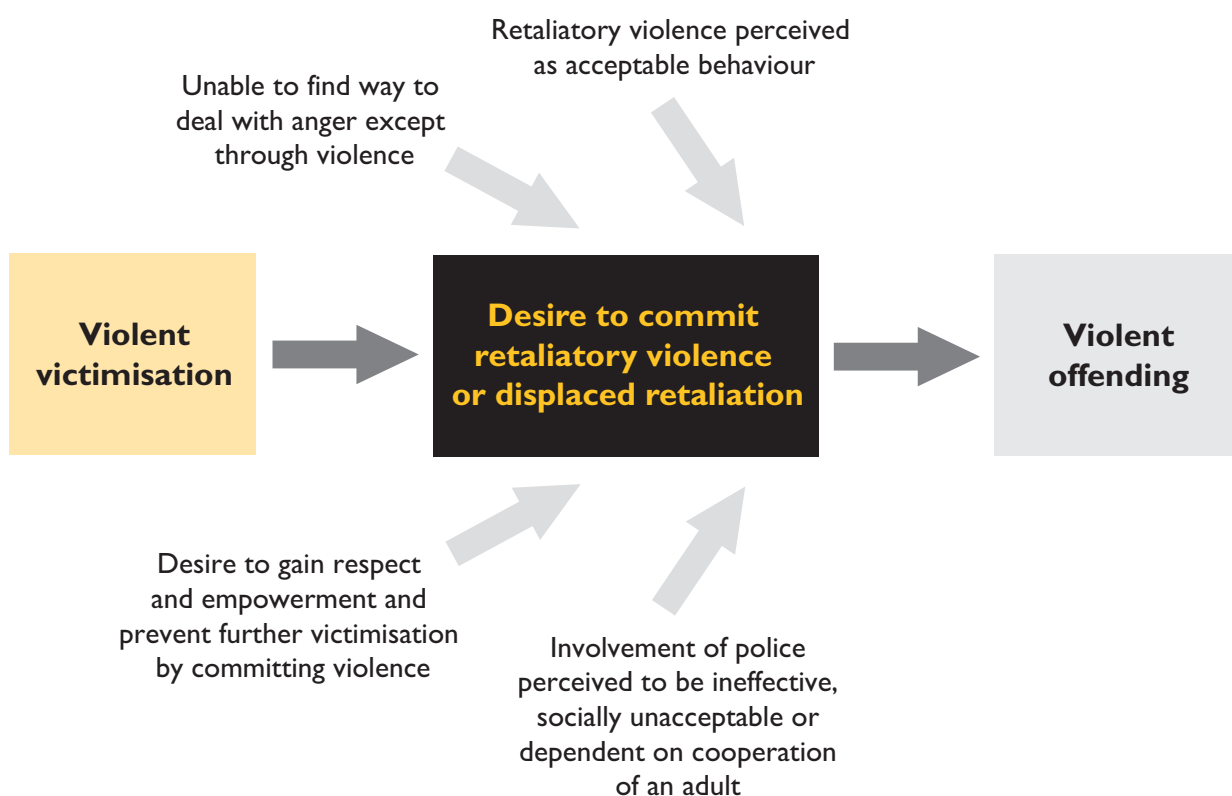
Retaliatory violence perceived
as acceptable behaviour

Unable to find way to
deal with anger except
through violence

Violent victimisation   →   **Desire to commit retaliatory violence or displaced retaliation**   →   **Violent offending**

Desire to gain respect
and empowerment and
prevent further victimisation
by committing violence

Involvement of police
perceived to be ineffective,
socially unacceptable or
dependent on cooperation
of an adult

Diagram 3: retaliatory violence and displaced retaliation

The retaliatory violence pathways included retaliatory violence by the victim against their attacker, and retaliatory violence by the victim against someone else as a reaction to their experience. These pathways were considered more likely to occur if other risk factors were also present in the victim. These risk factors included the views that:

- the only way to deal with anger was through violence
- retaliatory violence was acceptable behaviour
- involvement of the police would be ineffective or socially unacceptable
- by committing violence, the victim would gain respect and protect themselves from further victimisation.

Social isolation

| Violent victimisation | → | **Befriending offenders who involve the young person in offending behaviour** | → | Violent offending |

Perception that offenders can provide protection from victimisation

Diagram 4: befriending offenders

A victim of violence was thought to be more likely to befriend offenders, and so become involved in committing violent offences themselves, if they were exposed to other risk factors. These included feelings of social isolation, and the view that violent offenders could protect them from further victimisation. The presence of these risk factors was thought to make a victim more susceptible to offers of friendship from young offenders.

Pathways from violent offending to violent victimisation

The two pathways that were thought to explain how offending can lead to victimisation are: retaliatory violence by the victim; and a lack of protection of the offender from adults in authority. The retaliation pathway is summarised in diagram 5, and the lack of protection from adults in authority link in diagram 6 below.
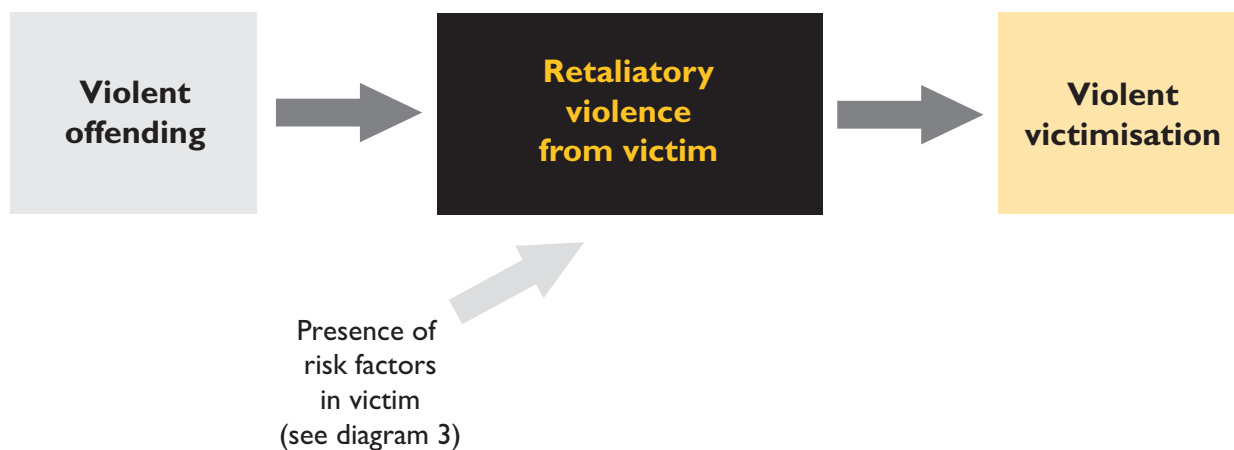

Diagram 5: being a victim of retaliatory violence

An offender was thought to be more likely to become a victim of retaliatory violence if their victim experienced the risk factors summarised in diagram 3, above. As discussed, these risk factors were considered to increase the likelihood that the victim would commit retaliatory violence against the offender.
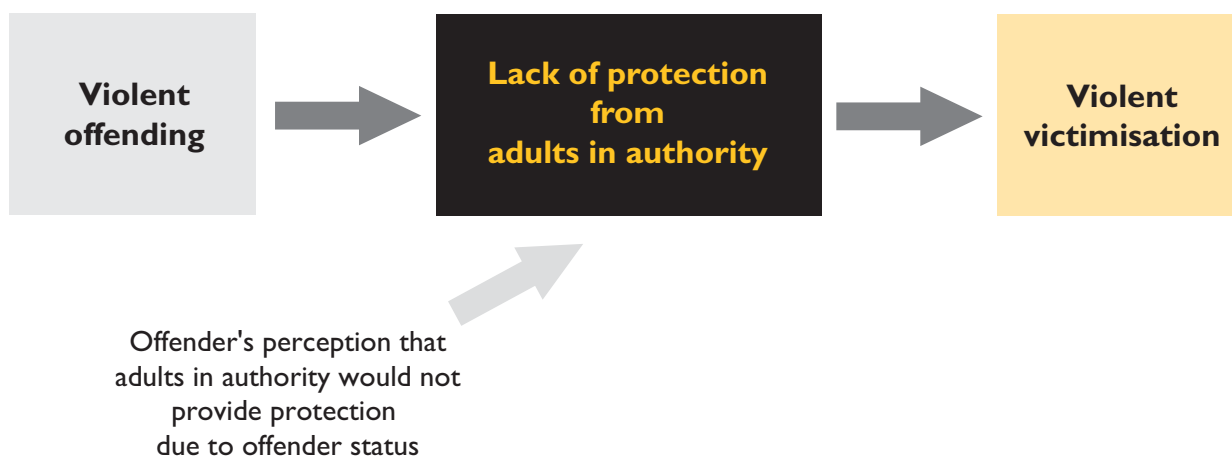
```
┌─────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────┐
│   Violent   │   →    │  Lack of protection │   →    │   Violent   │
│  offending  │        │        from         │        │ victimisation│
│             │        │ adults in authority │        │             │
└─────────────┘        └─────────────────────┘        └─────────────┘
                              ↗
         Offender's perception that
         adults in authority would not
              provide protection
              due to offender status
```

Diagram 6: lack of protection from adults in authority

Violent offenders were thought to be less likely to be protected by adults in authority because of their offender status. Whether or not this pathway occurred was considered to depend on the offender's perceptions of the treatment they would receive from adults in authority.

6 Support

This chapter explores young people's and practitioners' views on what kinds of support could help prevent a young person from getting caught up in the victim-offender link. Participants did not distinguish between appropriate support for an offender and appropriate support for a victim. Instead, they focused on the aspects of support that could prevent someone experiencing both. It should be noted that these are the views of participants only, which present ideas that can be tested in further research.

Young people were asked their views on the types of support that might prevent future offending and victimisation and the potential link between the two. They were also asked about the kind of support they had received.

Factors associated with successful support focused on helping young people to express the attitudes and emotions that influenced the victim-offender link. Young people felt the following were key aspects of appropriate support:

- having someone to talk to
- impartial support
- a non-authoritarian approach
- promotion of self-confidence
- practical ideas
- parental guidance
- opportunities for recreation.

6.1 Someone to talk to

The opportunity for a young person to express themselves by talking to someone about their experiences and feelings was considered key to prevent the pathway between victimisation and offending. The experiences of victimisation and offending were felt to leave young people feeling anxious, angry, confused and frustrated. As explained in chapter 5, young people were thought to resort to violence as a way of releasing such emotions, particularly if they had a poor relationship with their parents or did not have friends whom they could trust. It was suggested that these feelings could be dealt with at an earlier stage, by talking to someone on a one-to-one basis.

> "I think you really need like a buddy or something, people that they can talk to, or even say, this is happening … someone where they've got like a let-off point."
>
> *Male, 17, victim then offender*

One participant explained that she found talking to a Victim Support worker particularly helpful to release tension that had built up after being violently victimised.

> "I think that when I went to go and speak, everything that had built up during the day for however many weeks it built up, I would go and release it and feel so happy afterwards. I would feel really different, like I did before it happened."
>
> *Female, 15, victim but not offender*

6.2   Impartial support

Impartial support from someone who was not too closely involved in the young person's life was considered most helpful. For example, one participant explained that she had appreciated being able to speak to a Victim Support worker about things that she could not talk to her mother about. This was because her mother was too emotionally involved to listen calmly and without judgement. This suggests that even if a young person has a positive relationship with a parent, they could still benefit from support from someone outside their circle of family and friends.

6.3   Non-authoritarian approach

Support offered by someone who exerted their authority over the young person was thought to be less likely to succeed. People from social services, schools and youth offending teams were seen as having authority over a young person. This authority meant that they were considered more likely to try to control the young person's behaviour than to listen and provide support. Practitioners were considered less effective if they were preoccupied with telling the young person how to behave, rather than listening to why they had offended.

> "The best things kids can get are youth workers that understand them rather than someone who says to them 'look, you are doing this wrong, you are doing that wrong, so a slap on your wrist and do everything right'. Someone who understands them and speaks to them intimately rather than just going by the book. Young kids do not like going by the book. If anyone went by the book, it used to go in one ear and out the other."
>
> *Male, 18, victim and offender*

Support was thought to be less successful if a young person was spoken to in a patronising way. Young people appreciated feeling that they had been treated as an equal, or 'like an adult'. It was suggested that young people, rather than adults in positions of authority, were more likely to listen to other young people.

> "I don't think students listen to teachers because they think … stuff the teachers because they are just adults and they think they know everything. I think it should be a student. I have always wanted to have the confidence to go up to someone and explain everything in my life that's actually happened to me. The only person that is going to get that across is another student like me."
>
> *Male, 14, victim but not offender*

The removal of authority was thought to make a young person feel that they were in control of a situation, and were participating on their own terms. It was suggested that the young person could have more control over the situation by organising support meetings themselves.

"Where they've got someone they can ring up themselves, at no matter what age, and someone will come and see them, they can go out for a drink and, you know go and do something … and then they can see them again if they want or not."
Male, 17, victim then offender

Practitioners' views

Practitioners agreed that support that gave young people control of the process was most likely to be effective. Mediation that took place without parents being involved was considered more likely to be successful. This was because it helped young people to resolve conflicts with others themselves, rather than having to involve parents to deal with their problems for them.

"If they are dealing with other youngsters they are not losing face by having parents coming in … there is that control there."
Practitioner

A non-authoritarian approach was also felt to encourage a young person to trust the supporter. This was thought to allow the young person to engage in and therefore benefit from support provision more readily.

6.4   Promotion of self-confidence

Young people's views

Confidence-building exercises were considered important as they could encourage young people to do what they know is right, rather than become involved in violence due to peer pressure.

"Loads of times I've been with my friends and all of a sudden you just don't like that girl, and it's all because of what other people are saying. It's like when you're with one person you act like this and [with another] person you're like that."
Female, 16, victim and offender

It was suggested that young people's confidence would increase through sharing experiences of violence with their peers.

"I have always wanted to have the confidence to go up to someone and explain that you don't have to be, you don't have to have the same life as everybody else to be yourself."
Male, 14, victim but not offender

Practitioners suggested several ways that support services could promote a young person's self-confidence. These included:

- providing an outlet to express their feelings
- having someone to talk to. Practitioners suggested that the experience of being listened to signified to a young person that someone cared about them and believed that they were worth taking an interest in. This was thought to promote a young person's self esteem, particularly if the person they could talk to was seen as uncritical.
- group work. Exercises in which young people told each other about their experiences were thought to encourage them to feel accepted by their peers, which in turn increased their confidence.

6.5   Practical ideas

Young people's views

As well as talking about feelings, it was felt that guidance on practical ideas to deal with their situation were useful for young people involved in crime (either as victims or offenders). Practical exercises that had helped victims deal with their experiences were described. These were thought to help in various ways, including by raising the young person's self-esteem.

> "We wrote a thing called an action plan and things to do when you are feeling down, things to do if we ever have an argument. We do this other exercise where everything is to do with me, which is what would I describe myself as, enthusiastic, dramatic and stuff. Whenever I was down I would look at that and it would make me feel better, which I think really helped."
>
> *Female, 15, victim but not offender*

One victim described how practical ideas had helped her overcome her fear of going out since being attacked.

> "When this happened I didn't want to go out at all. I did go to Victim Support, and the lady that I spoke to found ways around me going out and she gave me a panic alarm, which was really good. She said to obviously take my panic alarm with me and because it was on a string to put it around my wrist and I would be fine. Who to go to if I ever get into trouble, like to go into a shop and tell someone or go to the police. Not to be on my own, be with my friends if I was going out and coming home and stuff."
>
> *Female, 15, victim but not offender*

Anger management therapy was also considered a successful way of giving young people practical strategies for changing their behaviour and coping with their experiences.

6.6   Parental guidance

Support from a parent or parent figure was considered key to preventing young people being involved in crime. It was thought that young people who grew up without responsible guidance from a parent were more likely to become involved in crime, either as victims or offenders.

> "'Cos if you got family, you got your mum, your dad, everyone is there you don't really need to offend. But like, say you ain't got no one there, it's more likely you are gonna offend because you don't care really, 'cos [there is] no one to tell you what is right and what's wrong, you've got your [friends] to do that, but they ain't lived, they are living it with you, they [haven't got] the experience already. That's the difference."
> *Female, 15, victim and offender*

Participants who had not offended said that they felt they had learned from a parent that offending behaviour was wrong.

> "I would never dare to actually bully someone else because … as my mum taught me, if you have got something to say, if it is something nasty, then you keep it to yourself. Or if it is something that is going to help the person, you say it to them but you say it in the right way not the wrong way."
> *Male, 14, victim but not offender*

6.7   Opportunities for recreation

Better availability of recreational facilities was suggested as a way to help young people occupy their time in a safe environment and avoid becoming involved in crime, either as victims or offenders. Support given to those we interviewed included time spent with people doing activities that would keep them busy, so that they would not get into trouble. It was felt that recreational facilities should be more affordable, to make them more accessible to young people.

> "There is nothing to do with our days. If we're not in college we just sit here every day, bored. We're out on the street making trouble because there is nothing to do. You can't go nowhere because you have to pay for this, you have to pay for that. They should have a room where we could go … Sky, Playstation, games or the internet. There's no youth clubs. Most of them are closed down and there's nothing left, except for making trouble."
> *Female, 17, victim and offender*

Physical activities were felt to give the added benefit of allowing young people to release energy and anger in a more positive way than committing a violent offence.

> "I do boxing and it really worked. It helps you just forget about the bad times and you just get your anger out and then it goes. I used to go in the morning from about ten o'clock till about three and then I'd be tired and I'd just rest. I couldn't even be bothered to open my mouth and gob off or start a fight. I'd be tired and worn out."
> *Female, 16, victim then offender*

6.8 Cooperation of young people

It was felt that little could be done to support young people involved in crime if they were not prepared to listen to or engage with it. However, it was considered important that support was available so that, if the young person did decide to seek help, they could get it.

6.9 Awareness of support available

It was suggested that young people would be more likely to use support services if they were promoted more widely. Awareness of available support services was considered to be low among young people who might need them. For example, victims who did not report the incident to the police were thought to be less likely to be aware of available support services, such as Victim Support. A lack of awareness among young people of what was involved in getting support was thought to discourage them from using services. Schools were considered an ideal place to promote support services.

6.10 Using different terms to avoid labelling

Practitioners' views

Support was thought to be more effective if alternatives to terms such as 'victim' and 'offender' were used. Such labels were felt to have negative connotations for young people. For example, the term 'victim' was thought to signify weakness. As a result of negative associations with the term 'offender', young offenders were thought to be less likely to get support from adults in authority.
As use of such terms was felt to be disempowering for the young people they referred to, services that used alternative terminology were considered more likely to engage young people who needed their support.

> "We keep putting young people into boxes and then disempowering them and no wonder they don't want to go to agencies for support. So I very much agree with allowing people to identify themselves [rather than identifying them] as something which their peers label as negative. [It is thought that] you're a victim because you're weak, you know it's your fault basically."
> *Practitioner*

6.11 Helping young people to see the police as more accessible

As discussed above, it was thought that some young people feel the police could only be contacted by an adult on their behalf. A young person affected by crime was therefore thought to depend on the help of an adult to get support from the police. Practitioners felt that it was important to encourage young people to feel able to contact the police themselves. This would make police support more accessible to young people and reduce their vulnerability to crime.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This research suggests that a link between violent victimisation and offending does indeed exist. The pathways between the two experiences were suggested by young people, on the basis of their own experiences, and by practitioners who drew on examples of young people they had worked with.

The research also found evidence, backing up previous findings, that young people who are both victims and offenders share certain characteristics or 'risk factors'.

Victims and offenders are often the same people. When adults treat a young person as just a victim or just an offender, they are not taking into account the complex, cyclical nature of the victim-offender link and the factors that influence young people's lives.

Our findings suggest that such assumptions may prevent policy-makers and service providers from understanding the real nature of young people's experiences of crime. This could make it harder for young people to get the kind of help that meets all their needs.

7.2 Risk and protective factors

Young people who had been victims of violent crime and offenders, along with those who had just been offenders, described a number of life experiences or factors that put them at a greater risk of offending or being a victim of crime. These included:

- poor relationships with parents
- negative experiences of school, including playing truant, exclusion or moving to a behaviour management school
- being bullied
- negative role models who encourage violent behaviour
- engaging in risky social activities, such as spending time with friends without adult supervision, engaging in petty delinquency, or drinking alcohol
- high crime levels in their neighbourhood
- a particularly negative outlook on past life events.

Interestingly, young victims who were not offenders reported positive life experiences or protective factors that helped to reduce the risk of offending. These included:

- a good relationship with parents
- a positive experience of education
- positive role models
- engaging in structured and supervised social activities with friends
- resistance to involvement in violence
- positive attitudes towards the police.

These risk and protective factors help to put the victim-offender link in context. Examining patterns of experiences, or combinations of risk factors, can help to identify which young people are most vulnerable to violent victimisation and offending. They can also provide a starting point for appropriate interventions.

7.3   The pathways between violent victimisation and offending

The young people who took part in the study suggested different pathways or behaviours to describe the victim-offender link.

The pathways from victimisation to offending included:
- the victim taking revenge through violence against the offender
- the victim taking revenge on someone other than the offender – ie displaced retaliation
- the victim making friends with offenders or peers, who involve the victim in violent offences.

Pathways from offending to victimisation included:
- retaliatory violence inflicted upon the offender by their victim
- a lack of protection for offenders by adults in authority. This increased their vulnerability to violent victimisation.

7.4   Attitudes that underpin the pathways

Our research suggested that the pathways between victimisation and offending were more likely to occur if young people held certain attitudes, outlooks and emotional responses to their experience of violence. These included:

- believing that retaliatory violence is acceptable
- negative attitudes toward the police
- a perception that police involvement is ineffective, socially unacceptable or dependent on adult cooperation
- a belief that adults in authority will not provide protection
- being unable to deal with anger in a non-violent way
- negative effects of victimisation on their self-esteem
- a desire to gain respect and empowerment by committing violence
- a desire to prevent further victimisation by committing violence
- a perception that associating with offenders will prevent further victimisation
- social isolation.

Young people who do not have these attitudes may be less likely to follow the pathways between victimisation and offending.

7.5   Understanding the link between violent offending and victimisation

As outlined above, our research describes a number of issues underlying victimisation and offending in young people, namely:

- risk and protective factors for victimisation and offending
- different pathways between victimisation and offending
- attitudes which make the pathways more likely.

The research suggests that it is the attitudes which have the strongest influence on the link between victimisation and offending. It could be argued that these attitudes are in fact the most direct 'causes' of the pathways between victimisation and offending.

The risk and protective factors, meanwhile, may not directly 'cause' the victim-offender link. Instead they may lead to it indirectly, by 'causing' young people's attitudes. The risk factors may make it more likely that the young person will have certain attitudes and beliefs. The protective factors may make certain attitudes less likely. Those attitudes then become the direct risk factors for the victim-offender link. This distinction between 'indirect' and 'direct' causes reflects the suggestion made by Wikström that risk factors related to life experience should be seen as 'distant' causes of crime, and attitudes or moral judgements should be seen as 'direct' causes.

Diagram 7: the cycle of experiences, attitudes and behaviours

For example, poor relationships with parents and risky social activities (risk factors) may lead a young person to believe that retaliatory violence is acceptable (attitudes). If that young person is a victim they may, as a result, be more likely to go on to commit retaliatory violence (pathway). This behaviour itself may lead to the young person experiencing further risk factors, such as developing a more negative attitude toward the police.

In this way, the link between being a victim and an offender can be seen as part of a cycle of experiences, attitudes and behaviours in young people's lives.

7.6   Interventions to prevent future violent victimisation and offending

This research suggests that the attitudes, views and emotional reactions of young people are key drivers underlying the pathways between being a victim and an offender. Consequently, it emerged that the best way to improve support services is to encourage young people to address and articulate their views and feelings.

The young people we interviewed did not distinguish between appropriate support for an offender and appropriate support for a victim. Instead, they focused on the aspects of support that could prevent someone experiencing either, or both.

We identified a number of ways to best support young people and prevent future violent victimisation and offending. These included giving young people:

- someone impartial and non-authoritarian to talk to
- practical strategies for dealing with their emotions and managing situations
- opportunities to increase their self-esteem
- sport or recreational activities to express themselves physically.

Such interventions could be appropriate at different points in the cycle outlined in diagram 7.

For example, helping young people to deal with their anger and increase their self-esteem could reduce the likelihood of retaliatory violence in both victims and offenders.

If we help young people to build their social networks and understand the protection that adults in authority can give, young victims may be less likely to be drawn into offending behaviour as a way of staying safe.

Our research also told us that awareness of, and equal access to, appropriate support services can be important factors in breaking the cycle.

7.7   Recommendations

The findings in this report have implications both in terms of victim and youth justice services and the wider children's policy agenda. Victim Support hopes that the findings will be taken on board by anyone with an interest in improving the lives of young people, including policy-makers and practitioners such as teachers, police, social and youth workers. The findings will also be important for parents and carers.

The research suggests a number of recommendations that policy-makers and practitioners should explore, together with young people, to help develop effective policies and services to address their needs.

These are:

- national provision of services that offer young people:
    - someone impartial and non-authoritarian to talk to
    - practical strategies for dealing with their emotions
    - opportunities to increase their self-esteem
- making sure that young victims and offenders have equal access to effective support services
- making sure that they are aware of the services available
- more initiatives to build young people's confidence in adult authority figures, particularly in relation to reporting crime and getting support
- more opportunities for young people to engage in structured and supervised social activities
- greater provision of physical recreation for young people
- education and awareness-raising to help young people identify less 'risky' ways to stay safe
- education and awareness-raising to discourage the belief that retaliatory violence is acceptable
- engaging parents and carers of young people in breaking the cycle of victimisation and offending
- making sure that policy and practice responses to young people reflect the fact that victims and offenders are often one and the same.

Many of these issues – such as opportunities for recreation and ways of staying safe – will also be important for parents to explore with their children. By doing this, parents could reduce the risk factors identified in this report, which can help to reduce future victimisation or offending in young people.

7.8 How Victim Support helps young people

The findings in this report demonstrate the importance of supporting young victims of crime, whether or not they are an offender. By enhancing young people's self esteem and feelings of safety and helping them to cope with the impact of victimisation, Victim Support's services can play a key role in preventing future violent victimisation and offending.

Victim Support offers free and confidential information, support and practical help for victims of crime, whether or not the crime has been reported to the police and regardless of when it happened. This includes support for young people, both those who have been victims of crime themselves and those who have been affected by crimes committed against people close to them. Support is often given in a whole family context, by working with the parent or carer to support their child.

Some branches of Victim Support are developing more in-depth and direct support services for young people, with specialist young victims' workers and volunteers who receive additional training.

These developments include:

- drop-in sessions in schools, youth groups and community locations, to give young victims the opportunity to seek impartial and confidential support – both practical and emotional
- workshops to raise awareness and educate young people about crime and victimisation, including the impact of violence on themselves and others
- involving young people in the development and delivery of Victim Support's services, through youth advisory panels and peer mentoring schemes.

However, Victim Support is not able to develop these services nationally given its current resources. But more funding of services for young victims could, in the long term, help to reduce expenditure for the criminal justice system.

7.9   Future research

Young people, practitioners and policy-makers shared very similar views, and the findings appear to be consistent with previous research. This research was exploratory in nature and the findings give new insight into young people's experiences and views on victimisation and offending. The study explored ideas about the relationship between offending and victimisation. These ideas could be investigated further and considered in the light of other research.

Practitioners and policy-makers suggested that additional research was needed in two key areas. These are:
- whether there is a difference in a young person's risk and protective factors if the violence involves a person in the family unit, rather than peers outside the home
- whether a young person's risk and protective factors are influenced by the gender of the victim and the offender.

Further research will help to enhance our understanding of the factors influencing the victim-offender link.

7.10   Conclusion

Our research has shown that it is vital to examine the experiences, attitudes and behaviours that influence the cycle of violent victimisation and offending in young people. Policy-makers and practitioners have a responsibility to make sure that their work with young people is properly informed by an understanding of young people's experiences and full information about their needs.

What we need now is for all those who are concerned with the well-being of the next generation to commit to putting these findings into practice.

8 Appendices

An outline of the research design and conduct is given in chapter 2 of this report. These appendices give further details of the research methods used in the project.

Appendix A: research design

The methods used in this research were wholly qualitative. This approach was used to allow individual experiences and views to be explored in detail. The purposive nature of the sample[5] design means that the research cannot provide any statistical data relating to the prevalence of these views, experiences or reflections in the general population. Any attempt to provide numerical evidence of this kind would require a quantitative research methodology ie a very different kind of research project. The aim of qualitative methods is to define and describe the range of emergent issues, rather than to measure their extent.

Appendix B: recruitment

The recruitment was managed by BMRB's internal field and research team, who used one recruiter to select the sample of participants. The field managers were fully briefed on the project and given detailed recruitment instructions and a screening questionnaire in order for the recruiter to assess their eligibility to participate in the research. Participants were recruited using face-to-face and telephone methods. The recruiter was a member of the IQCS (Interviewers Quality Control Scheme).

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[5] Purposive sampling ensures different characteristics are reflected in the sample. See appendix C.

Appendix C: sample design

	No. of participants
Age	
14	8
15	6
16	9
17	13
18	10
Gender	
Female	24
Male	22
Ethnicity	
White	18
Black	16
Asian	3
Mixed	8
Other	1
Pathway	
Victim and offender	29
Victim not offender	11
Offender not victim	5
At risk	1
Type of violence as victim	
Assault	26*
Wounding	22*
Robbery	2*
Type of violence as offender	
Assault	17*
Wounding	20*
Robbery	9*
Area	
Inner London	19
Outer London	9
Outside London	17
Unknown	1
Total	**46**

* Some participants had experiences of victimisation or offending involving multiple types of violence.

Appendix D: conduct of the interviews

The in-depth interviews were carried out by four qualitative researchers who have extensive experience and have been trained in the techniques of non-directive interviewing.

Appendix E: topic guide

bmrb

Topic guide
Depth interview with young person

Aim of the research

The aim of the research is to answer the following four questions:

- Is there a link between young people's involvement in crime either as a victim or as an offender?
- What makes a young person more or less likely to be involved in crime as an offender or as a victim?
- How does the relationship between victimisation and offending work?
- What help can young people be given to protect them from involvement with crime as a victim or as an offender?

1.   Introduction

- Purpose of the research – to find out about young people's experiences of crime as a victim or an offender
- About BMRB – independent research company
- Project for Victim Support
- Confidentiality/tape recording
- Duration of interview (45 minutes)
- Ask participant to read and sign consent form.

2.   Background, risk and protective factors

- Confirm participant's age
- Experiences of school and education. (Please probe current experience if still in school, or past experience if not.)
    - Whether currently in school
    - Plans for further education
    - Attitudes to school
    - Relationship with peers
    - Relationship with teachers
    - Whether they feel they do well academically
    - Levels of truancy (probe: at school level and individual)
    - Bullying (probe: at school level and individual)
- If not in school, explore how they spend their time during the day (job/college/hanging out etc)

- Relationship with family. Probe:
  - Contact with parents (probe: whether live with parents, contact with separated parents)
  - How well get on with parents/siblings
  - How much time spend with family
  - What sorts of things do with family
  - How much do parents know about what they do in free time

- Relationship with friends. Probe:
  - How they met friends
  - When they see friends
  - What sorts of things they do with friends
  - Views on what adults think of their friends when see them out

- Views on neighbourhood. Probe:
  - What they like/dislike about area live in
  - Whether they feel safe in area where live
  - Views on how much crime goes on in neighbourhood
  - Whether there are many gangs in area (probe: whether they are involved in a gang)

- Attitudes towards police. Probe:
  - Explore any contact they or their friends have had with police
  - Explore general views on police
    - reasons for views.

3.   Victimisation

- Ask participant to consider whether someone has used violence against them (eg kicking, punching, throwing something at them to hurt them, or using a weapon against them).
  If answer no, move on to section 4: offending.
- Explore number of incidents where they have been a victim of violence.
- Explore the incident/s when they have been a victim of a violent crime. If they have been a victim in more than one incident, please explore the different incidents and any links between them.

  For each incident probe:
  - who was involved (offender/s, other victims)
  - whether they knew the offender
  - what happened
  - when it happened
  - where it happened.

- Explore whether they have been a victim of any non-violent crime.

4.   Offending

- Ask participant to consider whether they have ever used violence against someone (eg kicking, punching, throwing something at them to hurt them, or using a weapon against them).
- Explore number of incidents where they have committed a violent offence.
- Explore the incident/s when they have committed a violent offence. If they have committed more than one offence, please explore the different incidents and any links between them.

    For each incident, probe:
    - who was involved (other offender/s, victim/s)
    - whether they knew the victim
    - what happened
    - when it happened
    - where it happened
    - whether they were arrested for the offence
    - what was the outcome of the arrest.
- Explore whether they have committed any non-violent offences.

5.   Pathways/links between victimisation and offending

River of Life exercise

- Show the young person the example provided and explain what it shows.
- Encourage them to draw their own River of Life from the beginning of their life to the present time, going up to show good times in their life, and going down when they have had difficult times.
- Ask them to mark when different events have happened, including any risk factors described above eg being excluded from school, parents separating etc.

This can be used as an enabling tool for further discussion later in the interview.

"Amy was bullied at school by a group of girls. After this had gone on for a year or so, Amy joined the group of girls who had been bullying her. This meant that Amy herself got involved in bullying other people with her friends."

Explore:
- whether they think Amy should have joined the group
- why they think Amy joined the group
- whether they think the bullying would have stopped if she hadn't joined the group
- views on whether this happens a lot.

"Michael was beaten up in a street near his house and his attacker stole his mobile phone. Michael didn't tell the police. The following week, Michael was out with his mates and saw the guy who stole his phone. Michael and his friends approached him and beat him up, which meant that the guy had to go to hospital."

Explore:
- why they think Michael didn't tell the police
- why they think Michael approached the guy.

Explore views on:
- whether committing a violent offence makes someone more likely to be a victim of a violent offence
- whether being a victim of a violent offence makes someone more likely to commit a violent offence themselves.

Explore reasons for views.

For the following section, use the River of Life exercise as a tool, pointing out events which may have acted as risk/protective factors.

- If the participant is both a victim and an offender of violent crime, explore views on why they have been both.
- If the participant is a victim but not an offender, explore views on why other victims become offenders and they haven't done so
  - What has helped them?
- If the participant is an offender but not an victim, explore views on why other offenders have become victims and they haven't
  - What has helped them?

6.   Services

Explore views on:
- what contact with services they had after becoming a victim/offender
- how useful help they received was
- what other help would they have liked as a victim/offender
- barriers to service provision they encountered
- what help could be given to victims of crime to stop them from becoming offenders
- what help could be given to young people who commit violent crime to protect them from being a victim of a violent crime.

Check whether any other comments/questions for the researcher.

Thank participant and close.

Appendix F: analysis and interpretation

All the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Analysis started with the sifting, summarising and sorting of the transcripts according to key issues and themes. A set of content analysis techniques was used, known as 'matrix mapping'.

This began with a familiarisation stage and included a review of the transcripts and a debrief session with the research team at the end of fieldwork. A thematic framework was constructed, based on the coverage of the topic guide, the researchers' experiences of conducting the fieldwork and the preliminary review of the data. The analysis then summarised and synthesised the data according to this framework using a range of techniques such as cognitive mapping and data matrices. When all the data had been sifted according to the core themes, the analyst mapped the data and identified features within the data: defining concepts; mapping the range and nature of phenomenon; creating typologies; finding associations; and providing explanations.

The data was analysed, taking into account age, ethnicity, gender, pathway, and type of violence experienced. Where interesting themes emerged, these have been highlighted.

The findings have been illustrated and illuminated with the use of verbatim quotations and examples. In addition to verbatim data, non-verbal communications and researchers' thoughts, feelings and opinions were reflexively captured through researcher field notes, to make sure that the findings were contextualised.

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