



1 Introduction

The extent and significance of repeat victimisation have only recently been recognised. According to Skogan (cited in National Institute of Justice 1996) "Probably the most important criminological insight of the decade has been the discovery in a very systematic fashion of repeat multiple victimisation. This has tremendous implications both for criminological theory and ... practice in the field" (p. 3). It is well known that some people, households or other targets are victimised more frequently than others, thereby contributing to a large proportion of all offences experienced. This uneven distribution of offences in the general population has raised the possibility of developing crime prevention strategies around repeat victimisation. It has been argued on the basis of evidence from crime victims surveys, that if repeat victimisation could be prevented, a significant proportion of personal and household crimes could be prevented (see for instance Farrell 1992). The Biting Back initiative (Chenery et al. 1997) developed and set up a strategy for preventing repeat burglary and motor vehicle theft in the Huddersfield division of West Yorkshire Police, UK. As a result of this project, which was in operation from October 1994 to March 1996, there was a reduction of 30 per cent in burglary and 20 per cent in motor vehicle theft, reduced levels of repeat domestic burglary, and improved quality of service to victims. It appears that strategies based on responses to victimisation could have a significant impact on prevention of crime.

Many scholars have recognised the theoretical relevance of understanding repeat victimisation. According to Sparks (1981), the study of repeat victimisation can "illuminate more general causal processes, and thus help to show how far, and in what ways, the attributes of behaviour of the victims themselves may help to explain their victimisation" (p. 765).

The literature advances two competing though complementary explanations to repeat victimisation, known as state dependence and heterogeneity (see Lauritsen & Quinet 1995). State dependence suggests that victimisation changes the probability of further victimisation. Risk heterogeneity asserts that as a consequence of a set of characteristics, the probabilities of being victimised are not the same for all persons or households, and that these characteristics of potential crime targets mark them out as attractive. Identification of targets for preventive action is common to both approaches. The fact that victimisation can be associated with further victimisation enables the location of those targets with greater need of crime preventive assistance (see Chenery et al. 1996). Identification of potentially successful crime prevention efforts for reducing risk among repeat victims requires an understanding of the factors that account for repeat victimisation. A first step in any analysis of repeat victimisation is to determine the extent of its occurrence and its contribution to the total crime rates experienced by the community. The second natural step is to identify the

factors having an effect on repeat victimisation, and most importantly to determine in what way these factors influence the risk among repeat victims.

Repeat victimisation in Australia has been a neglected research area. Only recently has some research work started on the topic (see for example Guidi et al. 1997). The main source of data on repeat victimisation comes from the crime surveys conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. National crime surveys have taken place in 1975, 1983 and 1993, with the next one to be conducted in 1998. Crime surveys have also been conducted in the States, mostly by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Other State crime victims surveys have been conducted by the Queensland Government Statistician's Office (GSO) in 1991 and by the Victorian Department of Justice in 1997.

Use of these surveys for the study of victimisation in general, of repeat victimisation, and of other issues relating to crime in Australia has been limited by lack of access to unit record data. It was only in 1994 that the Australian Bureau of Statistics made available "confidentialised" unit record data for the National Crime and Safety Survey conducted in April 1993. At the time of writing, unit record data for the 1991 Queensland Crime Victims Survey (Queensland GSO 1992), also referred to as the 1991 Queensland CVS was also made available. This paper uses data from these two surveys.

The National Crime and Safety Survey Australia 1993 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1994), also referred to as the 1993 NCSS, shows that over 28 per cent of the households were repeat victims of property crime (break and enter, attempted break and enter, and motor vehicle theft) in the 12 months prior to the Survey, and these households suffered over 50 per cent of all property crime victimisations. The survey also shows that over 41 per cent of victims of personal crimes (assault, sexual assault, and robbery) experienced such crimes more than once and these accounted for about two-thirds of all violent crime victimisations. These findings are similar to those noted by Pease and Laycock (1996).

Development of crime prevention programs aimed at reducing repeat

victimisation depends upon knowledge of the characteristics of repeat victims and the surrounding environments. We conducted tests to determine whether the results from the national survey in 1993 were different from those from the State surveys. Testing procedures did not detect any significant differences in the distribution of repeat victimisation across surveys which enabled us to base analyses on the 1993 NCSS unit record data. This report discusses the extent and relevance of repeat victimisation in Australia, and to what extent individuals and households that suffer from repeat victimisation are similar to, or different from, single incident victims. We also look at the geographical distribution of repeat victimisation.

Three theoretical approaches to explaining crime have assumed a dominant position in recent years, particularly when crime prevention strategies are discussed. These approaches are "rational choice", "routine activity", and "opportunity and crime". Using survey data, we examine the relationship of a number of personal and household characteristics with both single and repeat victimisation.

This report continues with a discussion of the likely links between repeat victimisation and fear of crime. As the 1993 NCSS did not collect data on fear of crime, measures of fear collected by the 1991 Queensland CVS are used. Although limited to one jurisdiction, the results from this discussion are useful to identify some general patterns, which we feel may easily be extended to the whole of Australia.

The final section discusses the findings and the policy implications for crime prevention that emerge from the results. This section also discusses the limitations of current survey data to support more elaborate analyses of repeat victimisation and makes some suggestions.