

4 Regular Violent Offenders

This chapter focuses on offenders who self-reported having ever been a regular offender of one or more violent offences, but not a regular offender of any property or fraud offence (n=167).

Regular violent offenders constituted a small portion (eight per cent) of the total inmate population surveyed in this study. The majority (43 per cent) were aged 36 years or older, with few offenders (19 per cent) aged between 18 and 25 years. One in three regular violent offenders identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; this was higher than for the regular property offenders. Interestingly, regular violent offenders were somewhat more likely than the regular property offenders to have completed year 10 of school and less likely to have been incarcerated in a juvenile detention centre.

Table 4.1 Demographic characteristics for regular violent offenders

	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Age distribution						
18–20	5	9	5	5	11	7
21–25	10	18	10	9	20	12
26–30	17	31	19	18	37	22
31–35	11	20	16	15	28	17
36+	12	22	57	53	71	43
<i>(Total)</i>	<i>(55)</i>	<i>(100)</i>	<i>(107)</i>	<i>(100)</i>	<i>(167)</i>	<i>(100)</i>
Educational attainment						
Never went to school	2	4	2	2	4	2
Completed some primary school	1	2	1	1	2	1
Primary school	17	31	18	17	36	22
Year 10	19	35	25	23	45	27
Apprenticeship	1	2	10	9	13	8
Year 12	1	2	4	4	5	3
TAFE/technical college	14	26	34	32	49	29
Tertiary	0	0	13	12	13	8
<i>(Total)</i>	<i>(55)</i>	<i>(100)</i>	<i>(107)</i>	<i>(100)</i>	<i>(167)</i>	<i>(100)</i>
Prior juvenile detention	12	22	9	8	21	13

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

There were significant differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous regular violent offenders—Indigenous regular violent offenders were younger, had lower educational levels, and were more likely to have spent time in a juvenile detention centre.

Offending Histories

Regular violent offenders had moderate offending careers when compared with other offender types. The proportions of violent offenders self-reporting having ever committed each of the individual offence categories was around 30 per cent and suggested that violent offenders less frequently offended across a broad range of violent and property offences. Of the total group, 64 per cent reported having ever committed three or more of the offences as asked by the DUCO questionnaire. Seventy-five per cent self-reported having ever committed a physical assault while just over one third (37 per cent) had ever committed a sexual offence. In terms of regular offending, 59 per cent self-reported the regular commission of physical assault. This was followed by just over one quarter (28 per cent) that reported regularly committing a sex offence. Only 11 offenders (seven per cent) within this sample reported regularly committing two or more of the violent offences asked in the DUCO male survey.

Like regular property offenders, the majority of regular violent offenders (65 per cent) self-reported having committed at least one property offence in their lifetime. Lifetime prevalence was highest for break and enter offences (35 per cent) and stealing without break in (34 per cent), followed by the theft of motor vehicles (28 per cent). However, compared with regular property offenders, regular violent offenders were much less likely to have committed a range of property offences.

In terms of drug market activity, regular violent offenders did report buying and selling illegal drugs but not to the same level as regular property offenders. Fifty-five per cent reported having ever bought illegal drugs, while 34 per cent reported having ever sold them. This decreases to 42 per cent reporting that they regularly purchase illegal drugs and 20 per cent reporting regularly selling illegal drugs. The onset and persistence of crime associated with illegal drug use was not as evident amongst this group of offenders.

Table 4.2 Prevalence of offending for regular violent offenders

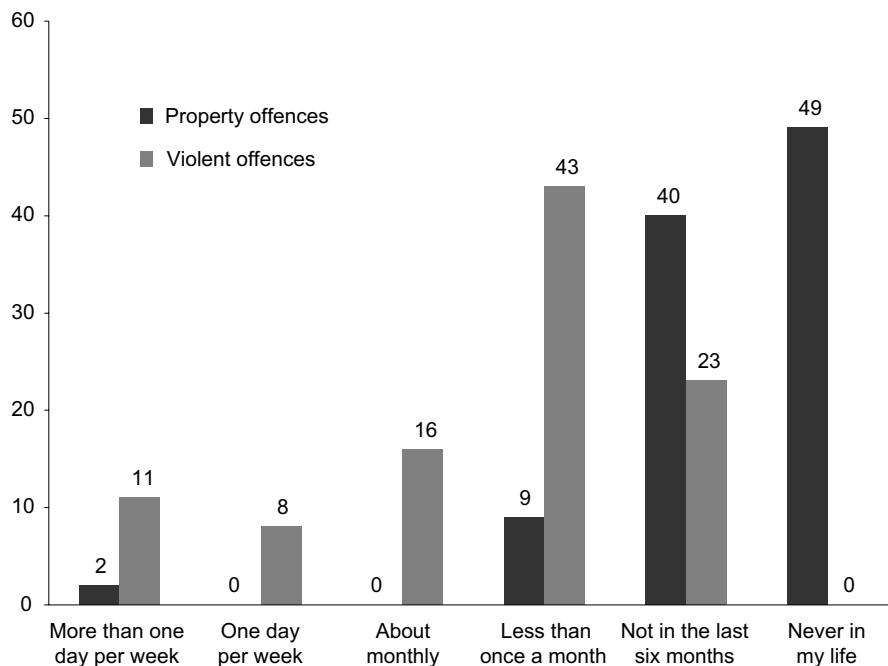
	Ever		Regular		Escalation
	n	%	n	%	%
Violent offences					
Physical assault	126	75	99	59	79
Robbery without a weapon	23	14	8	5	35
Armed robbery	37	22	26	16	70
Sexual offence	61	37	47	28	77
Killed someone	16	10	0	0	0
Property offences					
Break and enter	59	35	–	–	–
Stealing without break in	57	34	–	–	–
Motor vehicle theft	47	28	–	–	–
Traded in stolen goods	37	22	–	–	–
Vandalism	44	26	–	–	–
Fraud offences					
Fraud	21	13	–	–	–
Drug offences					
Bought illegal drugs	91	55	70	42	77
Sell illegal drugs	57	34	33	20	58
Multiple offences					
Three or more offences	107	64	35	21	33
Any property offence	109	65	–	–	–

Escalation = 'regular' divided by 'ever'.

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

Figure 4.1 examines self-reported offending behaviour during the six months prior to the most recent arrest. Seventy-seven per cent reported committing at least one violent offence during this time. Forty-three per cent reported that the frequency of their violent offending was less than once a month, while 11 per cent reported the occurrence was daily. The data suggest that regular violent offenders, although self-defined as 'regular', offend less frequently than regular property offenders. Only three regular violent offenders reported property offending more than one day per week, but did not self-report themselves as a regular property offender. All other regular violent offenders reported property offending less than monthly or never in the six months prior to the arrest for which they are now in prison.

Figure 4.1 Volume of offending in the six months prior to arrest for regular violent offenders (per cent)



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

On average regular violent offenders have had 14 charges within their lifetime, and of these charges, an average of 11 resulted in a conviction (see table 4.3). The conversion between charge and conviction suggests that eight in every ten charges imposed on a regular violent offender resulted in a criminal conviction. Furthermore, of all convictions received by regular violent offenders, it was reported that 55 per cent resulted in a prison sentence. The mean number of convictions resulting in a prison sentence was six. As seen earlier, regular property offenders reported a lower conversion rate from conviction to sentence (38 per cent of convictions). This suggests that the nature of violent offences resulted in regular offenders of this type being more frequently sentenced to prison for their crimes, which were more likely to be more serious or severe than property crime. As suspected, similar results were found when analysing regular violent offender’s charge histories by their individual offence types. Again, these were consistent with what we would expect—intuitively suggesting that offender’s self-reports were relatively reliable.

The overall volume of charges was considerably lower than that reported by the regular property offenders and is consistent with what is known about the offending patterns of violent as opposed to property offenders.

Table 4.3 Offending outcomes for regular violent offenders

	Any	Violent	Property	Drug	Fraud
Mean (median) number of:					
Charges	14 (7)	12 (5)	2 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Convictions	11 (6)	10 (5)	1 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Prison sentences	6 (3)	6 (2)	1 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

The prison histories of regular violent offenders indicate that on average, they had been in an adult corrective institution a total of three times (table 4.4). Of the 13 per cent who had spent time in a juvenile detention centre the average number of imprisonment episodes was three and in total they had spent seven times in both an adult and juvenile detention centre. On average their rates of detention in juvenile and adult correctional institutions were slightly less than for the regular property offenders.

Table 4.4 Prison experience of regular violent offenders

	Mean (median) number of times
Prison experience	
Adult institutions	3 (2)
Juvenile detention centres	0 (0)
Of those having been in a juvenile detention centre (n=21)	
Juvenile detention centres	3 (2)
Both adult and juvenile centres	7 (7)

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

Drug Use Histories

As with the offending histories of regular violent offenders, drug use histories were complex but not as high as seen for regular property offenders. More than 70 per cent of all regular violent offenders had ever used one or more of the four main drug categories—cannabis, amphetamines, cocaine and heroin. Fifty-six per cent had used at least one of these drugs in the six months prior to their most recent arrest, and 49 per cent were defined as a current regular user of at least one drug. Twenty-five per cent reported the use of two or more of these drugs in the six months prior to arrest.

Table 4.5 Prevalence of illegal drug use amongst regular violent offenders (per cent)

	Cannabis	Amphetamines	Heroin	Cocaine	Any	More than 1
Prevalence						
Ever used	68	40	24	24	71	40
Used in six months prior to arrest	51	26	12	11	56	25
Current regular user	43	16	8	6	49	16
Escalation						
(<i>n</i>)	(71)	(27)	(14)	(10)	(81)	(26)
Current regular users—frequency of use						
Less than monthly	9	4	0	0		
One to several times a month	10	4	7	10		
One to several times a week	21	30	14	60		
Once a day	7	19	14	10		
Several times a day	54	44	64	20		
(Total)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)		

Escalation = 'current regular' divided by 'ever used'

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

The most frequently used drug was cannabis, with 68 per cent reporting having used it at least once. Forty per cent reported having ever used amphetamines and 24 per cent reported heroin and cocaine use. Cannabis was the drug most used in the six months prior to their most recent arrest (51 per cent). Amphetamines (26 per cent) and heroin (12 per cent) were the next most frequently used drugs during this period.

The third row of table 4.5 provides the percentages that defined themselves as regular users who also reported using in the six months prior to their most recent arrest. Forty-nine per cent were current regular users of at least one of the four main drug types prior to arrest, while only 16 per cent were current regular users of more than one of these drugs. The majority of these were cannabis users (43 per cent) while 16 per cent were current regular users of amphetamines. Only eight per cent were current regular users of heroin and six per cent were current regular users of cocaine.

Table 4.5 also illustrates the frequency of use for violent offenders who were current regular users of each drug type. As with the regular property offenders (and the sample as a whole) heroin users tended to report more frequent use than the regular users of the other three drugs. There is a potential and important difference between the groups in regard to cocaine, although the numbers are very small. Amongst regular property offenders who also were regular users of cocaine, 60 per cent reported using once a week or more; the comparable figure for regular violent offenders is 90 per cent.

Linking Drugs and Violent Offenders

Age of Onset

Table 4.6 illustrates the self-reported ages of first offence for regular violent offenders. On average, regular violent offenders began their offending careers at the approximate age of 17 years, this being the mean age of first offence across all offences. The first violent offence occurred at the average age of 20 years. This is noticeably later than the average age of initiation into property crime amongst the regular property offenders. Although around three quarters of all regular violent offenders reported lifetime prevalence of property offending,

they did not report escalation to regular property offending. Interestingly, in this group the first occurrence of property offending was most likely to have preceded violent offending by an average of two years. The mean age of first property offence was 15 years, which was still two years older than that of regular property offenders.

For regular violent offenders who did not self-report any property offending, the mean age of first offence across all offence types including drug offences was 24. For violent offending only, the mean age of first offence was 25. The data presented here illustrate the complex picture that surrounds the lifetime offending histories of regular violent offenders. It suggests that regular violent offenders with a history of property offending begin their offending careers at a much earlier age than regular violent offenders without a history of property offending.

Table 4.6 Mean age of first offending for regular violent offenders

	Any Offence ¹	Any violent offence	Any property offence
First offence			
Mean age	17	20	–
(n)	(167)	(167)	–
Of offenders with no history of property offending			
First offence	24	25	–
(n)	(58)	(58)	–
Of offenders with a history of property offending			
First offence	13	17	15
(n)	(109)	(109)	(109)

¹ Estimates include drug offences

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

In this group of offenders, the difference in the age of first offence across any offence type was large (13 years versus 24 years). Similar differences were found for the mean age of violent offences only.

It is possible that the variation in the ages of onset seen here are more the result of the offence type rather than any other factor. Further analysis of these data suggests that regular violent offenders with a history of property offending were less

likely to report having ever committed a sex offence than regular violent offenders with no history of property offending. Sex offending first occurred at a much older age than physical assault, robbery or armed robbery (table 4.7).

Table 4.7 illustrates the mean ages of first and regular offending among offenders with regular offending histories for each individual offence. Fifty-nine per cent of regular violent offenders reported having been a regular offender of physical assault. Of these, the mean age of the first assault was 17 years and the age at which physical assault became regular was 18 years. For offenders who reported being a regular sex offender, the first offence occurred at a mean age of 30 and regular offending at age 32. Also included in table 4.7 is the number of years between first and regular offending for each individual offence type. For regular offenders of sex offences and armed robbery, the mean age difference between first and regular offending was two years, while for physical assault, it was one year.

Table 4.7 Mean age of regular offending for regular violent offenders

	Assault	Sex offence	Robbery ¹	Armed robbery
First offence	17	30	20	20
Regular offending	18	32	20	22
<i>Interval (regular–first)</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>(n)</i>	<i>(99)</i>	<i>(47)</i>	<i>(8)</i>	<i>(26)</i>

¹Robbery without a weapon

Estimates are for regular offenders of that offence.

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

On average, regular violent offenders began their drug use at the approximate age of 17 years, this being the mean age of first use across all four drug types (see table 4.8). The drug type most likely to be used first was cannabis (17 years), followed equally by amphetamines, heroin and cocaine (21 years). In terms of continuance with drug use the data suggest a much shorter gap between onset and persistence for cannabis and heroin (one year), with two years for amphetamines, and three for cocaine.

It is apparent that cannabis use preceded other drug use by approximately four years. When data from table 4.6 and table 4.8 are compared, it can be seen that violent offending careers began at approximately the same average age as drug use. However upon further analysis (see table 4.9) regular violent offenders with

Table 4.8 Mean age of illegal drug use for regular violent offenders

	Cannabis	Amphetamines	Heroin	Cocaine	Any
First use					
Mean age	17	21	21	21	17
(n)	(108)	(66)	(40)	(39)	(112)
Of current regular users					
First use	16	20	20	18	
Regular use	17	22	21	21	
Interval (regular–first)	1	2	1	3	
(n)	(71)	(27)	(14)	(10)	

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

a history of property offending began drug use at a much earlier age than regular violent offenders with no history of property offending. For any of the four drug types combined, offenders with a lifetime history of property offending initiated drug use on average four years earlier than their counterparts with no history of property offending.

Analysis of offending and drug use for those who reported having ever committed a property offence and those who had not indicates that for regular violent offenders with a history of property offending, the first offence (most likely a property offence) started at the mean age of 13 years. Initiation into criminal offending preceded the first use of illegal drugs by two years. At the mean age of 17 years these offenders began regular use of illegal drugs, at which time the first violent offence also occurred. This was followed a further two years later with regular violent offending. It is important to note that estimates used in this pathways model include only those offenders who reported current regular use of any of the four main drug types. These offenders made up only 49 per cent of the regular violent offender sample.

Although the numbers are small, violent offenders without a history of property offending show a different pathway. The first violent offence occurred much later at the age of 19 years—the same age that first drug use commenced. Two years later regular violent offending began at 21 years of age, followed by regular illegal drug use at 22. The comparison between regular violent offenders with or without a history of property offending shows that where offenders reported the lifetime

prevalence of property offending, they were more likely to begin their offending careers, start illegal drug use, and escalate to regular illegal drug use on or before the commencement of violent and regular violent offending. Offenders without such a history did not regularly engage with illegal drugs until after they had escalated into a regular violent offending career.

Table 4.9 Pathways model for ages of onset by lifetime history of property offending for regular violent offenders¹

	First offence	Any drug use	Regular drug use	First violent offence	Regular violent offending	(n)
Including cannabis						
History of property offending	13	15	17	17	19	(68)
No history of property offending	17	19	22	19	21	(13)
No current regular drug use	20	–	–	22	25	(86)
Excluding cannabis						
History of property offending	12	19	22	16	19	(39)
No history of property offending	16	21	22	17	20	(4)

¹Estimates are for current regular drug users of any drug.

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

The last pathways model presented at table 4.9 (at line three) tracks the offending careers of offenders who did not escalate to become a current regular user of illegal drugs. As such, the ages of onset and persistence for drug use have been omitted; however the data suggest that the offending career of these offenders was delayed significantly by no less than three years. The mean age of first offence was 20 years followed by the first violent offence at 22 years, and regular violent offending at 25.

Lifetime Offending Attributions

As part of the core DUCO male survey instrument, offenders were asked what effect their personal alcohol and drug use had on their lifetime offending career. Of those violent offenders who provided an answer which could be defined as a numerical representation of the possible effect, 13 per cent self-reported that all (100 per cent) of their criminal activities could be in some way be attributed to their personal alcohol or drug use histories. A further 25 per cent reported that their drug use histories affected most (75 per cent) of their criminal activities, while

more than half stated that there was no effect. Compared with regular property offenders (59 per cent), fewer regular violent offenders (38 per cent) attributed most or all of their offending careers to the use of alcohol or illegal drugs.

The verbatim responses were again coded into a qualitative coding scheme. Sixty-one per cent stated that the effect was psychopharmacological. Ten per cent stated that their offending activities were driven by the economic/compulsive effects of drugs and alcohol, while a further 26 per cent stated that drugs and alcohol lead to crime, but did not provide further information on how this was the case. This is noticeably different from the regular property offenders who were more likely to indicate an economic/compulsive explanation than a psychopharmacological one.

Table 4.10 Lifetime offending attributions for regular violent offenders

	n	%
Of those who quantified the effect		
0 per cent	60	53
25 per cent	8	7
50 per cent	2	2
75 per cent	28	25
100 per cent	15	13
<i>(Total)</i>	<i>(113)</i>	<i>(100)</i>
Of those who qualified the effect		
Psychopharmacological	31	61
Economic/compulsive	5	10
Drugs and alcohol lead to crime	13	26
Other	2	3
<i>(Total)</i>	<i>(51)</i>	<i>(100)</i>

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

Conclusion

Regular violent offenders are a small proportion of the total male inmate population. In all, they reported less offending across a range of offence types, although they did report some property and drug offending. Two-thirds reported routinely engaging in physical assaults and one quarter reported regularly committing sexual assaults. Their onset into violent offending was later than the onset of property offending for the regular property offenders, indicating that a lifetime time career in violent offending began at a later age than property offending. Regular violent offenders were also less likely to report onset and persistence with illegal drugs when compared with other crime types.

However, this study suggest that there are two distinct pathways for regular violent offenders—those who begin their offending career with some property offending and those who do not. For those who do, the onset and persistence of both drug use and violent crime occurs at an earlier age than violent offenders without such as history. Despite this, drug use invariably commences after the commencement of offending.