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Abstract | Previous research exploring pathways into domestic and family violence (DFV) has primarily examined associations between early victimisation and future offending. Less is known about the relationship between adolescent DFV offending and adult DFV offending.

This study examined the offending pathways of 8,465 young offenders aged 13–17, who were followed until age 23. Only seven percent of young people in the sample had been proceeded against for a DFV offence before the age of 18. However, relative to other offenders who had been proceeded against for other forms of violent or non-violent offending, adolescent DFV offenders were much more likely to become adult DFV offenders, and reoffended more frequently.

These findings further highlight the need for interventions focusing on DFV offending among adolescents, and provide key evidence for identifying ideal points of intervention to prevent DFV in the community.

Do violent teens become violent adults? Links between juvenile and adult domestic and family violence

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A significant body of research has attempted to identify and understand pathways into domestic and family violence (DFV) behaviours. This work has examined the life events and factors that ‘predict’ or are associated with adult-perpetrated DFV (Chiodo et al. 2011; Ehrensaft et al. 2003; Magdol et al. 1998; Raine, Brennan & Mednick 1997). So far, this research has primarily explored the role of childhood exposure to DFV and has identified a strong link between these experiences and adult perpetration of DFV (Bassuk, Dawson & Huntington 2006; Grest, Amaro & Unger 2017). This relationship has typically been explained by way of social learning theory—that children learn that violence is an acceptable and appropriate means of communication and conflict resolution, a belief system which is carried with them into adulthood (Akers 2017).

By comparison, the relationship between *juvenile* behaviours such as adolescent DFV offending and future adult DFV perpetration is unclear. Adolescent DFV refers to acts of verbal, emotional, physical, social, psychological and/or financial abuse committed by an adolescent against their dating partner, intimate partner, parents, siblings, grandparents or kinship carers with the intention to harm, control, threaten or coerce (Clarke et al. 2016; Freeman 2018; Gebo 2007; Howard 2011; Howard & Abbott 2013; State of Victoria 2016).

Although it is well established that juvenile delinquency, aggression and involvement in any offending are correlated with adult DFV behaviours (Shortt et al. 2017; Smith et al. 2015; Theobald & Farrington 2012), only a small number of international studies have looked at adolescent DFV behaviours specifically. This research has identified that young people who were abusive towards family members or their partners are more likely to become adult perpetrators than young people who were not (Gomez 2011; Noland et al. 2004).

These findings are supported by recent research conducted in Australia that identified comparable reoffending rates among juvenile and adult DFV offenders. In two interrelated studies, researchers from the Australian Institute of Criminology analysed police administrative data on a sample of adult DFV offenders in Tasmania (Morgan, Boxall & Brown 2018) and young DFV offenders (aged 12–18 years) in Victoria (Boxall & Morgan 2020). The studies analysed the prevalence, timing, rates and patterns of short-term reoffending and identified almost identical rates of reoffending at key intervals within the six-month follow-up periods. Specifically, one in 10 adolescent and adult offenders came back into contact with police within 30 days and one in four within 180 days (Boxall & Morgan 2020; Morgan, Boxall & Brown 2018). Boxall and Morgan (2020) noted the similarities between the findings from the two cohorts, suggesting that young people's abusive behaviours were becoming established and being 'rehearsed' prior to entering adulthood (Goldstein, Chesir-Teran & McFaul 2008).

In light of the above findings, it is perhaps not surprising that a number of authors have questioned whether adolescent DFV could be the 'missing link' explaining the intergenerational transmission of abusive behaviours (Gebo 2007; Howard 2011). It is necessary to conduct additional research to understand the potential links between juvenile and adult DFV behaviours using different datasets and methods. In particular, there is a need to unpack the relative importance of juvenile DFV behaviours specifically, as compared to other forms of aggression, delinquency and violence during adolescence. This would go some way to clarifying whether juvenile DFV offenders are clinically different from other violent young people, which could in turn provide a roadmap for intervention responses.

Aims

This study aimed to identify and describe the links between juvenile and adult DFV behaviours among a sample of Australian offenders reported to the police. In particular, this study intended to answer the following research questions:

- What proportion of juveniles reported for DFV offending went on to offend as young adults?
- Does juvenile involvement in DFV behaviours influence the frequency of offending during adulthood?
- Is DFV involvement during adolescence a unique risk factor for involvement in adult DFV-related behaviours relative to other violent behaviours and non-violent juvenile offending?

Method

To answer these research questions, we analysed administrative data collected for a cohort of individuals whose (reported) offending trajectories were followed for the period 2008 to 2018. Individuals selected for inclusion in the study were:

- born after 1983 (to ensure that they could be followed until the age of 23 years);
- charged by the NSW Police Force with their first offence between 10 March 2008 and 10 March 2009 (the reference period); and
- at least 13 years old at the start of the reference period.

The inclusion of the age requirement meant we were able to follow the sample of offenders until they were 23 years old. By following all respondents from the ages of 13–23 years, the observation period covered the two ‘peak’ periods for the onset of adolescent and adult DFV—14 years and 21 years respectively (Dowling, Boxall & Morgan 2021; Gebo 2007; Howard 2011; Snyder & McCurley 2008).

Data were extracted by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) and linked with incarceration records held in BOCSAR’s Reoffending Database. All offences included in the dataset resulted in a proceeding of some kind. Proceedings include referrals to juvenile justice conference, formal cautions and charges being laid. Offences were flagged as DFV-related if they met the definition of domestic violence included in the NSW Criminal Code.

Key definitions

As per the NSW Criminal Code, we defined domestic and family violence as a personal violence or other offence committed against a person the offender has, or has had, a domestic relationship with, intended to ‘coerce or control’ the victim or to cause them to be ‘intimidated or fearful’, or an offence perpetrated against an individual by intimate partners or family members (*Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007 (NSW)*, s 11). This included physical and sexual violence, as well as non-physical offences such as threats, stalking, neglect and property damage.

For the purposes of this study, juvenile offences were those that occurred prior to the offender’s 18th birthday (up to 17 years and 364 days), and adult offences were those that occurred on or after the offender’s 18th birthday and prior to their 24th birthday (up to 23 years and 364 days). Offences that occurred on or after the young person’s 24th birthday were removed from the dataset, as were minor traffic offences (ie speeding, parking fines).

Sample

The final sample comprised 15,421 offenders, of which 55 percent ($n=8,465$) had been proceeded against for at least one juvenile offence. The sample of juvenile offenders was divided into three groups which formed the basis for the subsequent analysis (see Table 1). The groups were identified based on the nature of the offences for which they had been proceeded against during their adolescence:

- seven percent ($n=571$) had been proceeded against for at least one DFV-related offence;
- 27 percent ($n=2,247$) had been proceeded against for violent offences against people other than family members or partners (eg friends, acquaintances, teachers, employers and strangers; hereafter referred to as the non-DFV violence group); and
- 67 percent ($n=5,647$) had been proceeded against only for non-violent offences, such as property damage and theft.

As shown in Table 1, juvenile non-violent offenders had not been proceeded against for any violent offences during adolescence while non-DFV violent offenders had not been proceeded against for any DFV-related offences.

Group	Definition	<i>n</i>	%
DFV group	Young person who was proceeded against for at least one DFV offence before their 18th birthday	571	7
Non-DFV violence group	Young person who was proceeded against for at least one violent offence before their 18th birthday AND had NOT been proceeded against for a DFV offence during the same period	2,247	27
Non-violent group	Young person who had been proceeded against for ANY non-violent offence prior to their 18th birthday, AND had not been proceeded against for a DFV or violent offence during the same period	5,647	67
Total		8,465	

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: NSW BOCSAR Reoffending Database 2010–2018 [computer file]

Table 2 provides an overview of select characteristics of the three groups. There were no significant gender differences across the three groups, but the majority of each group comprised males (ranging from 69–74% male within each group; $\chi^2(2)=5.92, p=0.05$). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander juveniles comprised 24–29 percent of DFV and non-DFV violent groups and nine percent of the non-violent group $\chi^2(4)=411.67, p<0.05$).

Average age of onset for any offence (violent or non-violent) was approximately 15–16 years and a one-way analysis of variance showed no differences between the three groups ($F(2, 8,465)=201.94, p=0.514$). The average number of offences juveniles were proceeded against during adolescence differed significantly between the three groups ($F(2, 8,465)=775.15, p<0.05$):

- juveniles in the DFV group were proceeded against for an average of 10.1 offences;
- juveniles in the non-DFV violence group were proceeded against for 5.7 offences; and
- juveniles in the non-violent group for 2.2 offences.

A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that juveniles in the DFV group were proceeded against for a significantly larger number of offences during adolescence compared to both the non-DFV violence group ($p<0.05$) and the non-violent group ($p<0.05$).

Over three-quarters of juveniles in the DFV and non-DFV violence groups had pled guilty to or been found guilty of an offence during their adolescence (75–87%). Although juveniles in the non-violent group were statistically less likely to have pled guilty to or been found guilty of an offence ($\chi^2(2)=506.01$, $p<0.001$, Cramér's $V=0.24$), analysis of the residuals between categories identified no differences between the two violent groups. Finally, the most serious violent offence recorded for young people in the DFV and non-DFV violence groups were compared. The analysis found that juveniles in the non-DFV violence group were statistically more likely than those in the DFV group to have been proceeded against for a serious assault offence (21% vs 34%), and less likely to have been proceeded against for a breach offence (<1% vs 14%; $\chi^2(12)=2.0e+03$, $p<0.001$, Cramér's $V=0.57$).

Table 2: Characteristics of juveniles, by group

	DFV group	Non-DFV violence group	Non-violent group
Sociodemographics (%)			
Male ^a	74	72	69
Indigenous status* (%)			
Indigenous	29	24	9
Non-Indigenous	70	72	84
Unknown	2	3	7
Criminal history information			
Average age of onset for first offence (any offence; years) (range)	15.4 (13–18)	15.7 (13–18)	16.2 (13–18)
Average number of offences during adolescence* (n) (range)	10.1 (1–95)	5.7 (1–60)	2.2 (1–82)
Guilty outcome for any offence during adolescence* (%)	87	75	53
Most serious violent offence^{b*} (%)			
Serious assault (including homicide)	21	34	–
Assault	45	44	–
Stalking	1	2	–
Sexual assault	1	4	–
Property ^c	17	12	–
Breach of orders	14	<1	–
Other	1	4	–

*statistically significant at $p<0.05$

a: Excludes 18 juveniles for whom this information was missing

b: Limited to juveniles in the DFV and non-DFV violence groups

c: Property offences were limited to robbery and other forms of property-related offending (eg property damage) that were perpetrated against family members or intimate partners

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: NSW BOCSAR Reoffending Database 2010–2018 [computer file]

Results

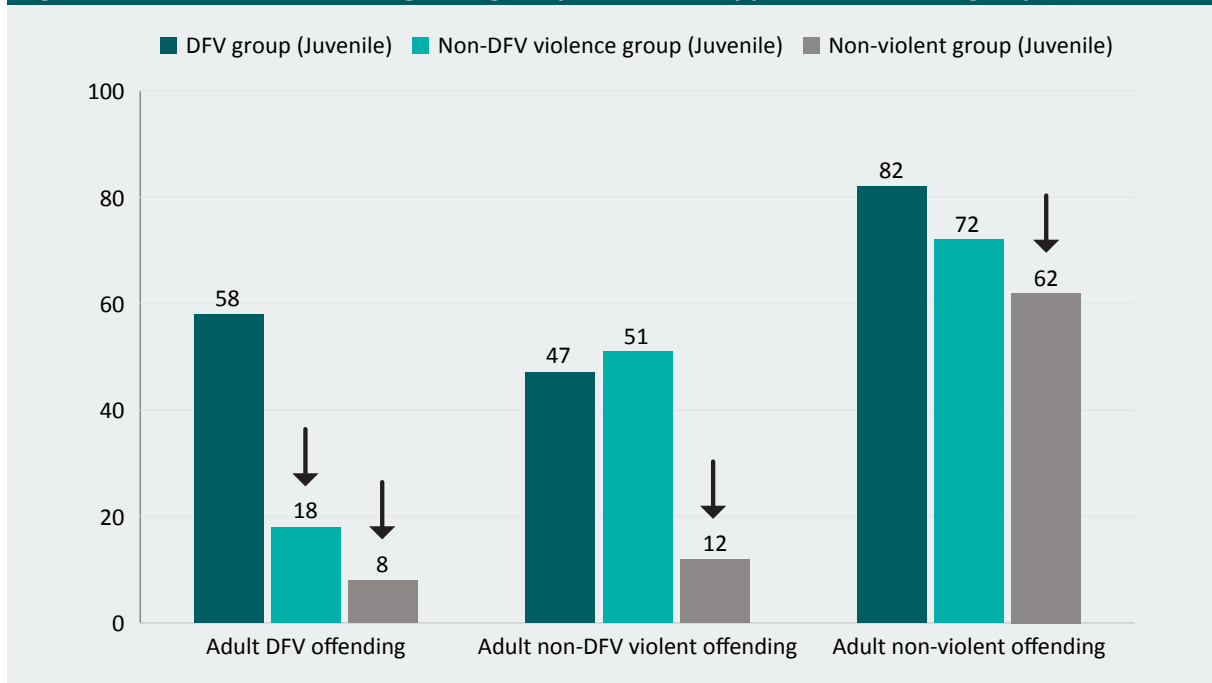
What proportion of juveniles reported for DFV offending went on to offend as young adults?

As shown in Figure 1, over half of juveniles in the DFV group were also violent towards family members and/or partners during adulthood (58%). In comparison, 18 percent of juveniles in the non-DFV violence group and eight percent in the non-violent group were proceeded against for DFV-related offences during adulthood (Figure 1). These differences were statistically significant ($\chi^2(2)=1.1e+03$, $p<0.05$, Cramér's $V=0.37$).

Juveniles in the DFV and non-DFV violence groups were more likely than juveniles in the non-violent group to be involved in other violent offending during adulthood ($\chi^2(2)=1.4e+03$, $p<0.05$, Cramér's $V=0.41$). However, there was no significant difference between the juvenile DFV group and non-DFV violence groups in their relative likelihood of future adult violent offending (47% vs 51%). A similar pattern emerged in relation to adult involvement in non-violent offending; juveniles in the DFV and non-DFV violence groups were statistically more likely than juveniles in the non-violent group to have been proceeded against at least once for this category of offending ($\chi^2(2)=137.72$, $p<0.05$, Cramér's $V=0.123$). Again, there was no difference between the juvenile DFV group and non-DFV violence group regarding the relative likelihood of non-violent offending.

As a starting point, what this suggests is that compared to other juvenile offending—particularly violence targeted at non-family members—DFV behaviours during adolescence are associated with adult DFV offending.

Figure 1: Prevalence of offending during early adulthood, by juvenile offender group (%)



↓ = this group of juveniles were statistically less likely to have been proceeded against for this offence type during young adulthood compared to juveniles in the DFV group

Source: NSW BOCSAR Reoffending Database 2010–2018 [computer file]

Does juvenile involvement in DFV behaviours influence the frequency of offending during adulthood?

The analysis identified a relationship between being proceeded against for a DFV offence as a juvenile and high-frequency DFV offending during young adulthood. As shown in Table 3:

- one in 10 (12%) juveniles in the DFV group were proceeded against for six or more DFV offences during young adulthood;
- three percent of juveniles in the non-DFV violence group were proceeded against for six or more DFV offences during young adulthood; and
- one percent of juveniles in the non-violent group were proceeded against for six or more DFV offences during young adulthood ($\chi^2(6)=1.2e+03$, $p<0.05$, Cramér's $V=0.26$).

The average number of adult DFV offences that a juvenile in the DFV group was proceeded against for was 2.3, compared to 0.6 for juveniles in the non-DFV violence group and 0.2 for juveniles in the non-violent group. A one-way analysis of variance identified statistically significant differences between the groups, with juveniles in the DFV group having higher rates of DFV offending during adulthood ($F(2, 8,465)=442.94$, $p<0.05$).

Although frequency of non-DFV violent offending was statistically lower for juveniles in the non-violent group (relative to the DFV and non-DFV violence groups; $F(2, 8,465)=551.92$, $p<0.05$), a Tukey post-hoc test identified no differences between the DFV and non-DFV violence groups ($p=0.60$). This means that the DFV group was no different to the non-DFV violence group in the frequency with which they committed violent offences during adulthood.

Table 3: Number of offences reported during early adulthood, by juvenile offender group (%)			
	DFV group	Non-DFV violence group	Non-violent group
DFV-related offences			
0	42	82	92
1	18	5	3
2–5 offences	28	10	3
6+ offences	12	3	1
Average (SD)	2.28 (3.64)	0.60 (1.74)	0.22 (1.13)
Non-DFV violent offences			
0	53	49	88
1	18	21	6
2–5 offences	23	24	5
6+ offences	6	6	1
Average (SD)	1.4 (2.21)	1.3 (2.17)	0.25 (0.87)

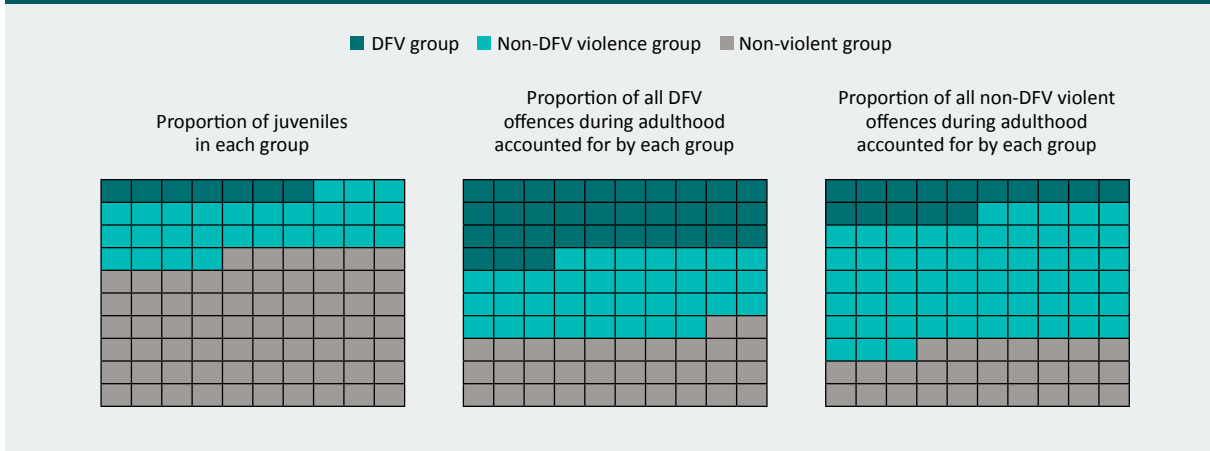
Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: NSW BOCSAR Reoffending Database 2010–2018 [computer file]

Further, as shown in Figure 2, juveniles in the DFV group accounted for a disproportionate number of adult-perpetrated DFV offences overall. Although juvenile DFV offenders comprised only seven percent of the juvenile sample overall, they were responsible for 33 percent of all DFV offences recorded against the entire sample during young adulthood (Figure 2). Juveniles in the non-DFV violence group comprised 27 percent of the sample yet accounted for 35 percent of adult DFV offences. Lastly, juveniles in the non-violent group accounted for 67 percent of the overall sample and were responsible for 32 percent of adult DFV offences recorded.

However, the concentration of non-DFV violent offending during adulthood—that is, the overall number of offences—also differed across juvenile groups. The majority (57%) of non-DFV violent offending in adulthood was perpetrated by juveniles from the non-DFV violence group, followed by the non-violent group (27%) and the DFV group (15%).

Figure 2: Concentration of offending in adulthood, by juvenile offender group (%)



Source: NSW BOCSAR 2010–2018 [computer file]

Is DFV involvement during adolescence a unique risk factor for involvement in adult DFV?

So far the analysis has demonstrated that juveniles in the DFV group were more likely than juveniles involved in other violent and non-violent behaviours to be reported for DFV offences during adulthood. In addition, they were also more likely to be prolific offenders and to account for a disproportionate number of adult-perpetrated DFV offences overall.

To explore these findings in more depth, a series of regression models (logistic and negative binomial) were estimated to identify whether juvenile involvement in DFV was still associated with adult DFV behaviours after controlling for other factors associated with DFV reoffending (Hulme, Morgan & Boxall 2019). For this stage of the analysis, comparisons were limited to the juveniles in the DFV and non-DFV violence groups.

Likelihood of any DFV offending during adulthood

As shown in Table 4, after controlling for a number of other factors, juvenile involvement in DFV-related behaviours was correlated with adult DFV offending. Juveniles in the DFV group had 6.5 times the odds of being reported for DFV offending during adulthood relative to juveniles in the non-DFV violence group (odds ratio (OR)=6.5, $R^2=0.22$, $\chi^2(16)=708.25$, $p<0.05$, area under the curve (AUC)=0.80).

Other factors that were significantly associated with adult DFV offending were:

- guilty outcome for any juvenile offence—juveniles who were found guilty of or pled guilty to any offence during adolescence had six times the odds of adult DFV offending (OR=5.9; $p<0.001$);
- Indigenous status—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander juveniles had 2.3 times the odds of being involved in any adult DFV offending relative to non-Indigenous juveniles (OR=2.3, $p<0.001$);
- number of non-DFV related juvenile offences (violent and non-violent)—relative to juveniles who had not been proceeded against for any non-DFV related offences (violent or non-violent), prolific generalist offenders (defined as those who perpetrated seven or more offences) had twice the odds of being reported for adult DFV offending (OR=2.0; $p<0.05$);
- gender—juvenile males had 1.3 times the odds of being involved in adult DFV offending relative to females (OR=1.3, $p<0.05$); and
- age of onset for any violent behaviours—an increase of one year in age of onset for any violent behaviours (DFV or otherwise) increased the odds of adult DFV offending by 1.2 times (OR=1.2, $p<0.001$).

Table 4: Logistic regression model predicting prevalence of DFV offending during adulthood (n=2,815)

	Coefficient	Odds ratio	p	95% CI (upper-lower)
Juvenile DFV offenders vs non-DFV violent juvenile offenders	1.87	6.5	0.000	4.93–8.63
Gender (male vs female)	0.26	1.3	0.028	1.02–1.65
Indigenous status (vs non-Indigenous)				
Indigenous	0.82	2.3	0.000	1.84–2.83
Unknown	-2.07	0.1	0.005	0.03–0.54
Criminal history information				
Any breach of violence orders	0.17	1.2	0.414	0.79–1.78
At least one guilty outcome for any offence 13–17 years (vs 0 guilty outcomes)	1.77	5.9	0.000	3.92–8.84
Number of non-DFV related offences 13–17 years (vs 0 offences)				
1–2 offences	0.09	1.1	0.739	0.64–1.87
3–6 offences	0.21	1.2	0.448	0.72–2.12
7+ offences	0.69	2.0	0.013	1.15–3.45
Most serious violent offence (vs assault)				
Serious assault (including homicide and manslaughter)	-0.26	0.8	0.023	0.61–0.96
Stalking	-0.01	1.0	0.979	0.50–1.98
Sexual assault	-1.31	0.3	0.003	0.11–0.64
Property ^a	-0.20	0.8	0.200	0.61–1.11
Breach	-0.78	0.5	0.009	0.26–0.82
Other	-0.48	0.6	0.137	0.33–1.16
Age of onset for any violent offence	0.20	1.2	0.000	1.12–1.33

a: Property offences were limited to robbery and other forms of property-related offending (eg property damage) that were perpetrated against family members or intimate partners

Note: CI=confidence interval

Source: NSW BOCSAR Reoffending Database 2010–2018 [computer file]

Frequency of DFV offending during young adulthood

There was also a relationship between DFV offending as a juvenile and frequency of DFV offending during adulthood. After controlling for the same factors listed in Table 4, the analysis identified that juvenile involvement in DFV behaviours was significantly associated with more frequent adult DFV offending.

A negative binomial model was estimated to examine the relationship between juvenile involvement in DFV behaviours and *frequency* of adult DFV offending. Negative binomial regression was chosen for this analysis because the dependent variable, frequency of DFV offences, is a non-normal count variable (ie it is over-dispersed; Payne et al. 2017).

The findings showed that frequency of adult DFV offending was three times higher for juveniles in the DFV group relative to juveniles in the non-DFV violence group (incidence rate ratio (IRR)=3.37; $\chi^2(16)=578.03$, $p<0.05$). Other factors that were again correlated with frequency of adult DFV offending were:

- guilty outcome for any juvenile offence—frequency of adult DFV offending was nine times higher for juveniles who had pled guilty to or been found guilty of an offence during adolescence relative to juveniles who had not (IRR=9.0, $p<0.001$);
- Indigenous status—frequency of adult DFV offending was 1.8 times higher for Indigenous juveniles relative to non-Indigenous juveniles (IRR=1.8, $p<0.001$);
- gender—frequency of adult DFV offending was 1.5 times higher for male juveniles relative to females (IRR=1.5, $p<0.001$); and
- most serious offence—frequency of adult DFV offending was 0.36–0.80 times lower for juveniles whose most serious violence offence was a sexual assault (IRR=0.36, $p<0.01$), property offending (IRR=0.76, $p<0.05$) or breach offence (IRR=0.42, $p<0.01$) relative to a physical assault.

This preliminary analysis indicates that, compared with juveniles involved in other violent behaviours, juveniles who were reported to the police for DFV behaviours were more likely to be prolific DFV offenders and involved in any DFV offending as an adult.

Age of onset

Importantly, the above described models demonstrated that factors other than being proceeded against for a DFV offence as a juvenile were positively associated with DFV offending during young adulthood. For example, age of onset for any violent behaviour was also associated with adult DFV offending—as age of onset for any violent offending increased, the likelihood of DFV offending during young adulthood and frequency of offending also increased. In other words, juveniles who committed their first violent offence at an older age were more likely than younger first-time offenders to be reported for DFV offending in adulthood.

To explore the role of age of onset in more detail, the sample was divided into two groups based on the age they committed their first violent offence (ie 13–15 years old vs 16–17 years old). Re-estimated logistic regression models which again controlled for the same factors listed in Table 4 (excluding age of onset) identified that 13–15 year old juveniles in the DFV group had 2.7 times the odds of adult DFV offending relative to 13–15 year old juveniles in the non-DFV violence group (OR=2.7, $R^2=0.18$, $\chi^2(14)=225.91$, $p<0.05$, AUC=0.78). However, 16–17 year old juveniles in the DFV group had almost 10 times the odds of adult DFV offending relative to 16–17 year old juveniles in the non-DFV violence group (OR=9.6, $R^2=0.26$, $\chi^2(14)=496.29$, $p<0.05$, AUC=0.83).

Similarly, the revised negative binomial models identified that, relative to juveniles in the non-DFV violence group, the frequency of adult DFV offending was:

- 1.9 times greater for 13–15 year old juveniles in the DFV group (IRR=1.9; $\chi^2(15)=240.15$, $p<0.05$); and
- 3.9 times higher for 16–17 year old DFV offenders (IRR=3.9; $\chi^2(15)=376.81$, $p<0.05$).

In summary, although DFV offending at any age during adolescence is significantly associated with DFV offending during adulthood, the risk is highest among young people who are older (ie 16–17 years old) when their first offence is detected.

Discussion

The findings from this study identified a strong link between adolescent and adult involvement in DFV behaviours. A minority of offenders in the sample who had been proceeded against for at least one offence between the ages of 13 and 17 had been violent towards a family member or partner. Of these 571 juveniles, over half (58%) went on to offend as an adult, compared with 18 percent of other violent juvenile offenders. Further, although accounting for only seven percent of juveniles in the sample, this cohort of offenders accounted for a disproportionate number of adult DFV offenders (27%) and offences (33%). This suggests that identifying the minority of adolescents who engage in DFV behaviours is a worthwhile intervention target, potentially preventing a substantial proportion of adult DFV offending.

The analysis also identified that adolescent DFV involvement is a unique risk factor for adult DFV offending relative to other violent behaviours and non-violent adolescent offending. After controlling for a number of other factors associated with DFV offending and reoffending, adolescent DFV offenders were 6.5 times more likely to be proceeded against for an adult DFV offence compared with violent (non-DFV) adolescent offenders, and offended at a rate 1.9 times that of violent (non-DFV) adolescent offenders. These results are concerning given pro-violence attitudes (Flood & Fergus 2008; Leen et al. 2013), a history of bullying (Tippett & Wolke 2015) and lifetime violence-related behaviours (Acevedo et al. 2013) have been identified as significant risk factors for adult DFV.

Interestingly, age of onset for violent offending behaviours appeared to have an impact on likelihood and frequency of adult DFV offending. Relative to juveniles in the non-DFV violence group, adolescent DFV offenders aged 13–15 were twice as likely to be detected for an adult DFV offence. Meanwhile, adolescents in the DFV group who were 16–17 years old at time of their first violent offence had 9.6 times the odds of adult DFV offending, compared to young people in the non-DFV violence group who were also proceeded against for their first violent offence when they were 16–17 years old. Intimate relationships occurring later in adolescence (ie between the ages of 16 and 17) may be more likely to be maintained through early adulthood compared to intimate relationships occurring earlier (ie ages 13–15). Higher odds of engaging in adult DFV in 16–17 year olds compared to 13–15 year olds may therefore be due to relationship patterns that begin in late adolescence and persist into early adulthood or inform future relationship dynamics (Gomez 2011; Noland et al. 2004; Taquette & Monteiro 2019).

Second, higher odds of older adolescents engaging in adult DFV may manifest because DFV offending at 16 or 17 years is more proximal to adult DFV than DFV offending at 13 to 15 years. Capaldi et al. (2019) and Smith et al. (2015) argue that certain risk factors are more strongly associated with DFV because they are 'closer' to the event of interest, in this case adult DFV offending. For example, adolescent risk factors are more strongly associated with emerging adulthood DFV than adult DFV (Smith et al. 2015).

Regardless of the processes informing the relationship between age of onset and adult DFV, these results indicate that DFV in 16–17 year olds is a stronger predictor of adult DFV than DFV in 13–15 year olds or DFV in adolescence generally. Therefore, DFV offending between the ages of 16 and 17 may reflect a critical point of intervention. Although there is a growing number of prevention programs targeted at young people being rolled out in schools (eg Respectful Relationships and LoveBites) that aim to teach young people about healthy relationships and to identify signs of abusive behaviours, there is a notable dearth of tertiary programs. The policy vacuum around effective strategies for engaging young people detected for these behaviours suggests a significant proportion of DFV offenders are being missed at a key stage of their criminal career trajectory.

Conclusion

This study found that adolescent DFV offenders went on to account for a disproportionate amount of adult DFV offences and harm. Adolescent DFV offenders were more likely to perpetrate DFV as an adult relative to violent (non-DFV) adolescent offenders. It appears that an individual with a DFV offence in their adolescent criminal history is at higher risk of perpetrating DFV in adulthood.

While DFV offending in 16–17 year olds is likely impacted by other risk factors and influences (ie the peak age of offending, chronic offending, adolescent relationship patterns that persist into adulthood), it is clear that older adolescents represent an at-risk group. To avert those most at risk of engaging in adult DFV, existing adolescent DFV programs should dedicate resources to preventing family violence perpetrated by young people aged 16 years and over. Efforts to disrupt the DFV offending pathway between adolescence and young adulthood should be implemented broadly and early, ideally prior to developmental periods most strongly associated with future DFV offending.

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