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Abstract | In this paper we explore the prevalence and patterns of recorded domestic violence offending among outlaw motorcycle gang (OMCG) members in New South Wales. We then compare domestic violence offending among a sample of OMCG members and other male offenders who committed their first recorded offence in the same year.

Forty percent of OMCG members had been proceeded against for a domestic violence offence in the last 10 years. OMCG members were twice as likely to have been proceeded against for domestic violence offences as the wider male offending population. Domestic violence offending by OMCG members was more harmful and charges were less likely to result in a guilty outcome.

OMCG members have a greater propensity for violence and this includes domestic violence. This research has implications for law enforcement and domestic violence support services.

Outlaw motorcycle gangs and domestic violence

Anthony Morgan, Timothy Cubitt and Christopher Dowling

Outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMCGs), as they are most often known in Australia, have come to embody principles of camaraderie, discipline and loyalty, while exhibiting aggression, machismo and recklessness. This subculture is underpinned by hyper-masculine attitudes (Quinn 2001), which are receiving increasing attention following recent high-profile cases of violence against the partners of OMCG members (Kos & Howells 2017; Utting 2022).

A defining feature of OMCGs is their exclusively male membership (Lauchs, Bain & Bell 2015). Women have been refused membership of clubs since the 1960s, when they were first excluded from the Hells Angels (Barker 2015), though female-only clubs have, at times, existed in Australia (Veno 2012). While some clubs have promoted themselves as being family friendly and inclusive of partners (Boland et al. 2021), research has shown that women can be treated by members as property who can be sexualised, objectified and subjected to acts of sexual degradation and violence (Cooper 2004; Cooper & Bowden 2006; Hopper & Moore 1990; Veno 2012), though this varies according to their position and social status within the club (Robinson & Bain 2017).



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The involvement of women in OMCGs, including as victims of domestic violence perpetrated by club members, has received very little scholarly attention (Cooper 2004; Robinson & Bain 2017). This is despite clear evidence of high rates of violence among OMCG members generally, including evidence that these rates are increasing among younger members (Blokland et al. 2019; Morgan, Dowling & Voce 2020; Voce, Morgan & Dowling 2021). While some of this violence is associated with intra- and inter-club conflict, resulting from territorial disputes or the ‘patching over’ of members, it is also a feature of the outlaw lifestyle that characterises OMCGs.

Traditional gender norms—which promote male dominance, aggression, strength and competitiveness—and violence supportive attitudes are reflected in the OMCG lifestyle (Lauchs, Bain & Bell 2015; Wolf 1991). These norms are well established as key determinants of violence against women (McCarthy, Mehta & Haberland 2018). The strong group identity within OMCGs may reinforce and encourage these attitudes and norms. As well as leading to the objectification of women by OMCG members during club gatherings, these attitudes and norms potentially influence OMCG members’ behaviour with women outside of these settings, including in their intimate relationships.

There is some evidence from Queensland that partners of OMCG members are significantly more likely than the partners of other men to be a victim of domestic violence, including strangulation offences (Queensland Police Service 2021). Victims of OMCG-related domestic violence have also been shown to be present in samples of women receiving assistance from specialist support services (Cooper 2004). A recent study by Van Deuren et al. (2021) found that members of Dutch OMCGs were significantly more likely to perpetrate domestic violence compared with other Dutch citizens, including after taking into account differences in age profiles, ethnicity, income, educational level and work status. The violence perpetrated by OMCGs is likely also qualitatively different from domestic violence in other contexts, including in the use of gang affiliates to carry out acts of violence and control against a member’s intimate partner (see Coroners Court of Queensland 2021 for an example).

The reputation of OMCGs for their culture of secrecy and intimidation of victims and witnesses also presents challenges in holding OMCG members accountable for domestic violence offending. Certainly, there are unique circumstances associated with OMCG-related domestic violence. Partners who seek help from police about domestic violence can be at increased risk of retaliation, not only because of the domestic violence report but because they may be perceived to be acting as an informant, telling police about other club-related activities (Cooper & Bowden 2006). This can make it difficult for victim-survivors to provide evidence, so due consideration must be given to these circumstances (Coroners Court of Queensland 2021). There may also be negative perceptions of victim-survivors of OMCG-related domestic violence among criminal justice agencies because of their affiliation with OMCGs and, potentially, involvement in gang-related criminal activity (Cooper, Anaf & Bowden 2008).

Though it is somewhat intuitive that high rates of violence among OMCGs generally would include violence towards intimate partners, developing a better understanding of the nature of domestic violence among OMCG members can inform the approach of police, including those working in gang units, specialist domestic violence units and general duties officers. This can also help identify the support needs of victim-survivors of domestic violence by OMCG members. In this paper we aim to better understand the characteristics of recorded domestic violence offending among OMCG members in one Australian state and compare them with the domestic violence offending of other male offenders.

Methods

This paper presents the results from two related studies. The first examined patterns of domestic violence offending among OMCG members, while the second compared a subset of OMCG offenders with other offenders who committed their first recorded offence in the same year. In these two studies, we address the following research questions:

- How common is recorded domestic violence offending among OMCG members?
- How does the prevalence, frequency and persistence of recorded domestic violence among OMCG members with an offending history differ from that of non-OMCG offenders?
- How does the severity of domestic violence among OMCG members differ from that of non-OMCG offenders?
- Are there differences in the outcomes of domestic violence charges for OMCG members and non-OMCG offenders who are proceeded against by police?

Data for Study 1

Study 1 measured the prevalence and characteristics of recent recorded domestic violence offending among all known OMCG members in New South Wales with a recorded history of offending. This involved linking data from the NSW Police Force's (NSWPF) Gangs database on 5,512 individuals who had been identified by NSWPF as a member or associate of an OMCG, data from the Computerised Operational Policing System (COPS) on their recorded criminal histories, and data on their custodial episodes sourced from the Reoffending Database managed by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR). Individuals with missing or incomplete data or who were deceased were removed, and duplicated identities were resolved. After matching, aggregation and cleaning of data, 3,542 members were available for analysis. The analysis was restricted to members who were still active at the time of data extraction (February 2020; $n=2,246$), meaning they were still actively involved as members of a club and had at least one recorded criminal offence. We hereafter refer to these individuals as 'OMCG members'. Associates ($n=1,970$), broadly defined as individuals with a known affiliation to an OMCG but who do not hold an official status within the club, were excluded.

Data for Study 2

Study 2 compared OMCG members with a recorded history of offending with non-OMCG offenders. The sample, originally examined in Dowling, Boxall and Morgan (2021), was selected on the basis that they committed their first recorded offence in the same year. Data were provided by BOCSAR on the recorded criminal and custodial histories of a sample of 12,001 offenders born in or after 1984 who committed their first offence between March 2008 and February 2009—more specifically, their entire offending history in the 10 years after this first offence. These selection criteria were necessary to ensure the availability of the full recorded criminal history of each person (which may not be available for offenders born prior to 1984 due to the limits of historical data), and to ensure the accuracy of data on involvement in domestic violence for the 10-year observation period (hence selecting offenders who first offended in 2008–09). BOCSAR was also responsible for linking data on the identities of OMCG members, which were provided by NSWPF from their Gangs database (the same list used in Study 1), and information on finalised charges, which are charges that have been fully determined by the court and for which no further court proceedings are required. Within the sample of 12,001 offenders who met the selection criteria, 135 were known affiliates of OMCGs.

Analytic strategy

In Study 1, we analysed the recorded criminal histories of OMCG members for the 10 years prior to data extraction (May 2020). In Study 2, we measured offending in the 10 years after each offender's first recorded offence in 2008–09. We used consistent offence categories in both studies (namely, domestic violence offending and violent non-domestic offending), as well as focusing on the same criminal history characteristics.

Domestic violence offences included both violent and non-violent offences occurring during the observation period that were flagged in the NSWPF COPS as domestic violence related (ie committed against a current or former intimate partner). We also considered violent non-domestic offences, to determine whether the differences between OMCG members and non-OMCG offenders in relation to domestic violence reflect differences in violent offending more generally. Violent non-domestic offences included offences against individuals other than a former or current intimate partner, such as homicide, manslaughter, physical assault, stalking, threats, kidnapping or deprivation of liberty, and robbery offences.

Following the approach taken by Dowling, Boxall and Morgan (2021), we analysed the recorded criminal histories across several dimensions:

- onset, which refers to the age at which an individual committed their first recorded offence;
- frequency, which is the total number of offences an offender was recorded as having committed within the observation period; and
- persistence, which refers to the total number of times an offender was proceeded against by police, resulting in a finalised matter (ie where all charges are finalised and no further court proceedings are required).

The latter measure—persistence—was used to determine whether an individual had reoffended after having been proceeded against by police and their matter being finalised in court. Each finalised matter could involve multiple offences spanning multiple criminal events.

Offence harm was measured using a modified version of the Western Australian Crime Harm Index, which assigns each offence a harm index based on the court penalties imposed on first-time offenders (House & Neyroud 2018). This method has previously been applied to analysing the criminal offending of OMCGs (Morgan, Dowling & Voce 2020). Its value lies not in providing a meaningful estimate of the amount of harm caused by each offence but in measuring the relative harm of offending by two or more offenders or groups.

In Study 2 we analysed outcomes of finalised matters. We focused on whether an offender was found guilty of at least one of the domestic violence or violent non-domestic offences for which they had been proceeded against. While we compared OMCG members and non-OMCG offenders based on whether they had ever been found guilty, we needed to account for the fact one group may have more finalised matters than the other (thereby increasing the likelihood of at least one guilty outcome). We therefore also compared outcomes for the first finalised matter.

Even so, there may still be observable and unobservable differences between OMCG members and non-OMCG offenders, and particularly the characteristics of the index matter, which may be related to the likelihood of a guilty outcome. Given the small sample of OMCG members with a domestic violence offence ($n=50$) we used a statistical technique called nearest neighbour matching (see Abadie & Imbens 2006) to account for observable differences between the two groups. An advantage of nearest neighbour matching is that it allows for exact matches for variables that are not well balanced between the two groups of interest. Matching variables included the age of onset for domestic violence offending, the number of concurrent domestic violence charges, whether any of the domestic violence offences involved physical violence, and the geographic remoteness and socio-economic conditions of the offender's residence at the time of being proceeded against, as measured using the Socio Economic Index for Area (SEIFA). Nearest neighbour matching using 'teffects' in Stata was carried out to estimate the potential outcome for each case in the OMCG and non-OMCG group, and a coefficient of difference was calculated by taking the difference between the actual and estimated outcomes (Abadie & Imbens 2006). We repeated this process for violent non-domestic offences.

Limitations

There are obvious limitations to relying upon recorded criminal histories to measure domestic violence offending, given the relatively low rates of reporting to police (Morgan, Boxall & Payne 2022). This issue is likely to be amplified among OMCG members and their partners, given the culture of secrecy that exists within these clubs (Van Deuren et al. 2022). In the absence of alternative sources of data, the analysis presented in this paper provides at least a partial picture of the extent and characteristics of offending among OMCG members, relative to other offending cohorts. Relatedly, we note the limitations of relying on incident-level data, especially when there is growing evidence and recognition of coercive control as a key facet of domestic violence which is under-represented in criminal justice data (Stark & Hester 2019). Given what we know about OMCG culture and the population of domestic violence victims in recorded crime data, we assumed most of the victims of domestic violence offences perpetrated by OMCG members were female; however, the gender of victims was not available in the data used for this study.

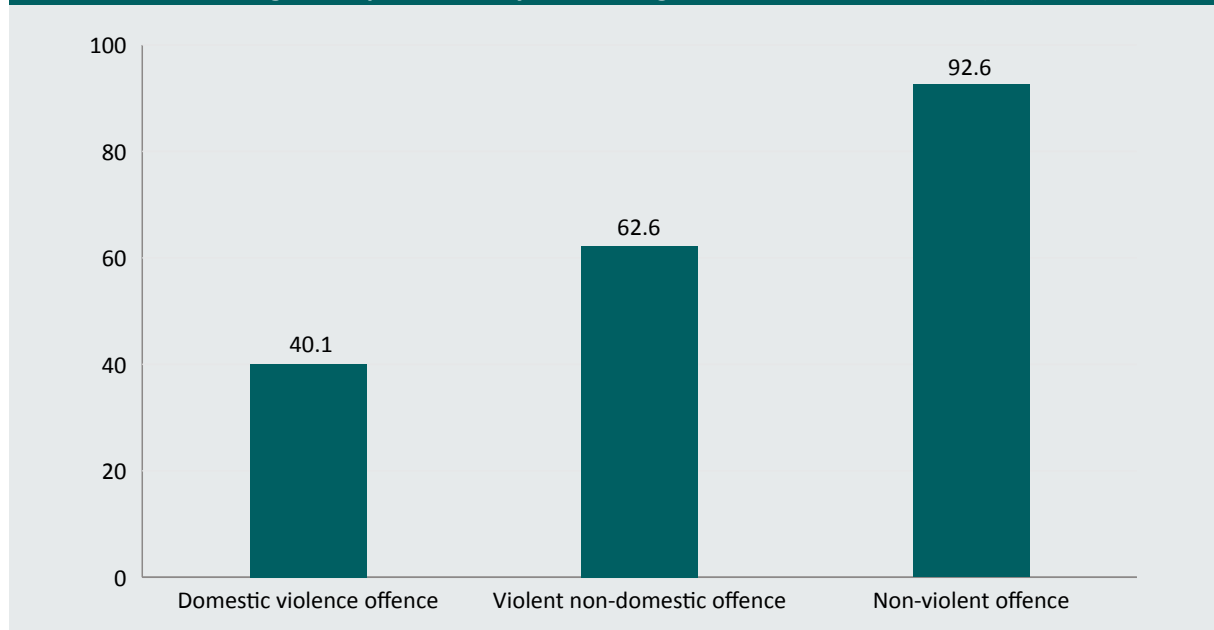
The sample of OMCG members in Study 2 was relatively small when compared to the larger sample of OMCG members in Study 1. Further, we know that a significant proportion of OMCG members are older than the sample used in Study 2 (see Morgan, Dowling & Voce 2020). While the rates of domestic violence offending were relatively similar in both the full sample and smaller subsample of OMCG members, we need to be cautious about generalising results from this study to the wider OMCG population. We also do not have data on when individuals joined an OMCG. The offending represented here was perpetrated by individuals who are known OMCG members, but the offences did not necessarily occur while they were members of an OMCG. This is especially true when we focus on early career offending, and the first finalised matter, in Study 2. Finally, there are limitations associated with the use of matching techniques to account for non-random assignment, most notably the inability to account for unobserved differences between the two groups being compared. We are cautious with regard to our conclusions about the differences between OMCG members and non-OMCG offenders for this reason.

Results

Study 1: How common is domestic violence offending among outlaw motorcycle gang members?

The prevalence of domestic violence, violent non-domestic offending and non-violent offending by OMCG members in the prior 10 years is presented in Figure 1. Overall, two in five OMCG members (40.1%) had been proceeded against for at least one domestic violence offence in the previous 10 years. Three in five (62.2%) had been proceeded against for a violent non-domestic offence, while nine in 10 (92.6%) had at least one recorded non-violent offence of any kind in the previous 10 years. A majority of domestic violence offences were assault offences (acts intended to cause injury; 74.1%).

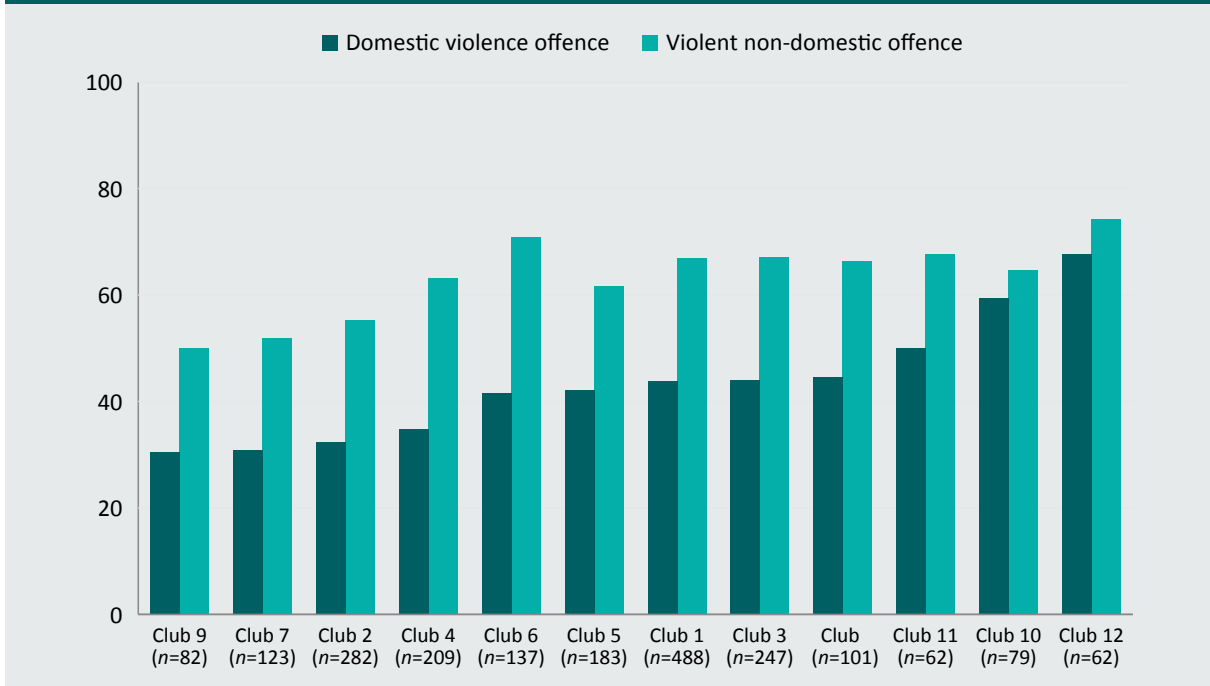
Figure 1: Prevalence of domestic violence offending, violent non-domestic offending and non-violent offending in the previous 10 years among OMCG members in NSW (%) (n=2,246)



Source: NSW BOC SAR; NSWPF [dataset]

Next, the prevalence of domestic violence and violent non-domestic offending among OMCG members was analysed by club affiliation (Figure 2). This was limited to the 12 clubs with at least 50 active members. There appeared to be more variation between clubs in domestic violence offending than in violent non-domestic offending. The prevalence of domestic violence offending ranged from 30.5 percent of members in Club 9 to 67.7 percent of members in Club 12. Even among the four largest clubs—those with more than 200 members—the prevalence of domestic violence offending ranged from 32.3 percent of members to 44.1 percent of members. This means that, even in clubs with the lowest rate of domestic violence offending, one in three members had a recorded history of domestic violence.

Figure 2: Prevalence of domestic violence and violent non-domestic offending among OMCG members in NSW, by club (%)



Source: NSW BOCSAR; NSWPF [dataset]

Study 2: How do outlaw motorcycle gang members compare to other offenders?

Characteristics of OMCG members and non-OMCG offenders in the sample of offenders who committed their first offence in 2008–09 are presented in Table 1. Eighty-two percent of OMCG members in the sample resided in a major city at their first police proceeding, a significantly higher proportion than among non-OMCG offenders (64.2%; $\chi^2(1)=18.1, p<0.001$). Similarly, OMCG members were much more likely to rank in the lowest socio-economic quartile at their first police proceeding (60.2% vs 32.9%), and much less likely to rank in the highest SEIFA quartile (1.5% vs 16.5%; $\chi^2(3)=51.6, p<0.001$).

Turning to criminal history characteristics, the age of onset for any offending was slightly lower among OMCG members than non-OMCG offenders (16.5 years vs 17.0 years; $t=2.32$, $p<0.05$). OMCG members offended more frequently over the 10-year observation period, with nearly three times as many offences on average (20.6 vs 7.2 offences; $t=-13.0$, $p<0.001$). Similarly, they were more likely to be proceeded against multiple times (91.1% vs 61.3%; $\chi^2(1)=50.1$, $p<0.001$), resulting in a higher number of finalised matters (7.8 vs 3.4 police proceedings; $t=-14.3$, $p<0.001$), indicating they were more persistent in their offending. Unsurprisingly, in light of these differences in recorded offending, OMCG members were substantially more likely to have been imprisoned on at least one occasion within the 10-year observation period (50.4% vs 10.0%; $\chi^2(1)=232.3$, $p<0.001$). This means that any difference in offending between the two groups is likely to be an underestimate, since the amount of time in the community during the 10-year observation period will be, on average, lower for OMCG members.

Table 1: Sample characteristics, by OMCG membership

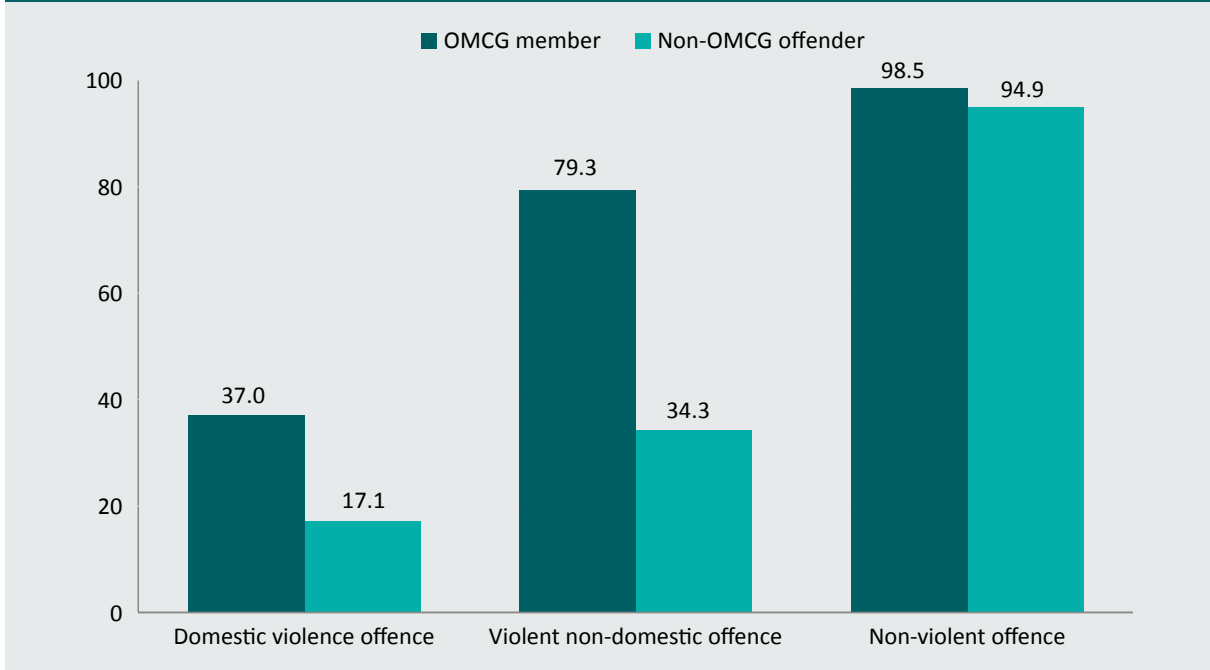
		OMCG members (<i>n</i> =135)	Non-OMCG offenders (<i>n</i> =11,866)
Sample characteristics			
Usual place of residence	Major city (%)	82.0	64.2
	Regional or remote (%)	18.0	35.8
SEIFA index	Quartile 1 (%)	60.2	32.9
	Quartile 2 (%)	23.3	29.0
	Quartile 3 (%)	15.0	21.6
	Quartile 4 (%)	1.5	16.5
Overall offending characteristics			
Age of onset ^a	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	16.5 (2.1)	17.0 (2.3)
Frequency	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	20.6 (17.4)	7.2 (11.9)
Persistence	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	7.8 (4.9)	3.4 (3.5)
	%	91.1	61.3
Versatility	Mean diversity index (<i>SD</i>)	0.7 (0.2)	0.4 (0.4)
Ever imprisoned	%	50.4	10.0

a: Age of onset missing for five non-OMCG offenders

Source: NSW BOCSAR; NSWPF [dataset]

As shown in Figure 3, OMCG members in the sample were significantly more likely than non-OMCG offenders to have a recorded history of domestic violence offending (37.0% vs 17.1%, $\chi^2(1)=37.2$, $p<0.001$). They were also significantly more likely to have a recorded history of non-domestic violent offending (79.3% vs 34.3%, $\chi^2(1)=118.7$, $p<0.001$). Most offenders in both samples had a history of non-violent offending (98.5% and 94.9%). Importantly, OMCG members accounted for a very small proportion of domestic violence offenders (2.4%) among the sample of offenders selected on the basis of the timing of their first offence.

Figure 3: Prevalence of domestic violence offending, violent non-domestic offending and non-violent offending, by OMCG membership (%)



Source: NSW BOCSAR; NSWPF [dataset]

We present characteristics of the domestic violence and violent non-domestic offending histories for both OMCG members and non-OMCG offenders (Table 2). There was no difference in the age of onset for domestic violence offending between the two groups (20.4 years for OMCG members and 20.2 for non-OMCG offenders; $t=-0.49$, $p=0.63$). OMCG members had, on average, a higher number of domestic violence offences (5.4 offences vs 3.7 offences; $t=-2.9$, $p<0.01$). There was no statistically significant difference in the proportion of OMCG members and non-members proceeded against for domestic violence offending on more than one occasion (48.0% vs 41.4%; $\chi^2(1)=0.9$, $p=0.35$). There was no difference between OMCG members and non-OMCG offenders in the median harm associated with individual offences (10.0 vs 8.0; $z=-1.38$, $p=0.17$); however, the median total harm associated with each finalised matter was significantly higher for OMCG members (22.0 vs 14.4; $z=-2.40$, $p<0.05$).

Similar patterns were observed for violent non-domestic offending, with no difference in the average age of onset between OMCG members and non-OMCG offenders (17.9 years vs 18.0 years; $t=0.46$, $p=0.65$), but more frequent (4.6 offences vs 2.7 offences; $t=-7.1$, $p<0.001$) and persistent offending (64.5% vs 40.0%; $\chi^2(1)=25.8$, $p<0.001$) among OMCG members. The median harm associated with each offence (52.0 vs 30.0; $z=-2.85$, $p<0.01$) and each finalised matter (52.0 vs 42.7; $z=-3.10$, $p<0.01$) was also significantly higher for OMCG members.

Table 2: Characteristics of violent offending histories, by OMCG membership

		Domestic violence		Non-domestic violence	
		OMCG members (n=50)	Non-OMCG offenders (n=2,026)	OMCG members (n=107)	Non-OMCG offenders (n=4,074)
Age of onset	Mean (SD)	20.4 (3.7)	20.2 (3.5)	17.9 (2.8)	18.0 (3.0)
Frequency	Mean (SD)	5.4 (5.4)	3.7 (4.0)	4.6 (4.4)	2.7 (2.7)
Persistence	Mean (SD)	2.2 (1.6)	1.9 (1.4)	2.7 (2.0)	1.8 (1.3)
	%	48.0	41.4	64.5	40.0
Harm per offence	Median	10.0	8.0	52.0	30.0
Harm per finalised matter	Median	22.0	14.4	52.0	42.7

Source: NSW BOCSAR; NSWPF [dataset]

Next, we examined the outcomes of finalised matters involving at least one domestic violence offence or at least one violent non-domestic offence (Table 3). There was no difference between OMCG members and non-OMCG offenders in the likelihood of being found guilty of at least one domestic violence offence (78.0% vs 83.3%; $\chi^2(1)=0.97, p=0.33$). There was, however, a significant relationship between OMCG membership and guilty outcomes for violent non-domestic offending (86.0% vs 73.1%; $\chi^2(1)=8.84, p<0.01$), with OMCG members more likely to have been found guilty of at least one violent non-domestic offence. This does not take into account differences in the number of times an individual has been proceeded against for the relevant offence—the more times a person has been proceeded against, the more likely they will be found guilty on at least one occasion. When we limited the analysis to the outcome of the first finalised matter, a lower proportion of OMCG members had been found guilty of a domestic violence offence (66.0% vs 76.0%), but this difference was not statistically significant ($\chi^2(1)=2.63, p=0.11$). There was no difference between the groups for violent non-domestic offending (56.1% vs 57.2%; $\chi^2(1)=0.05, p=0.82$).

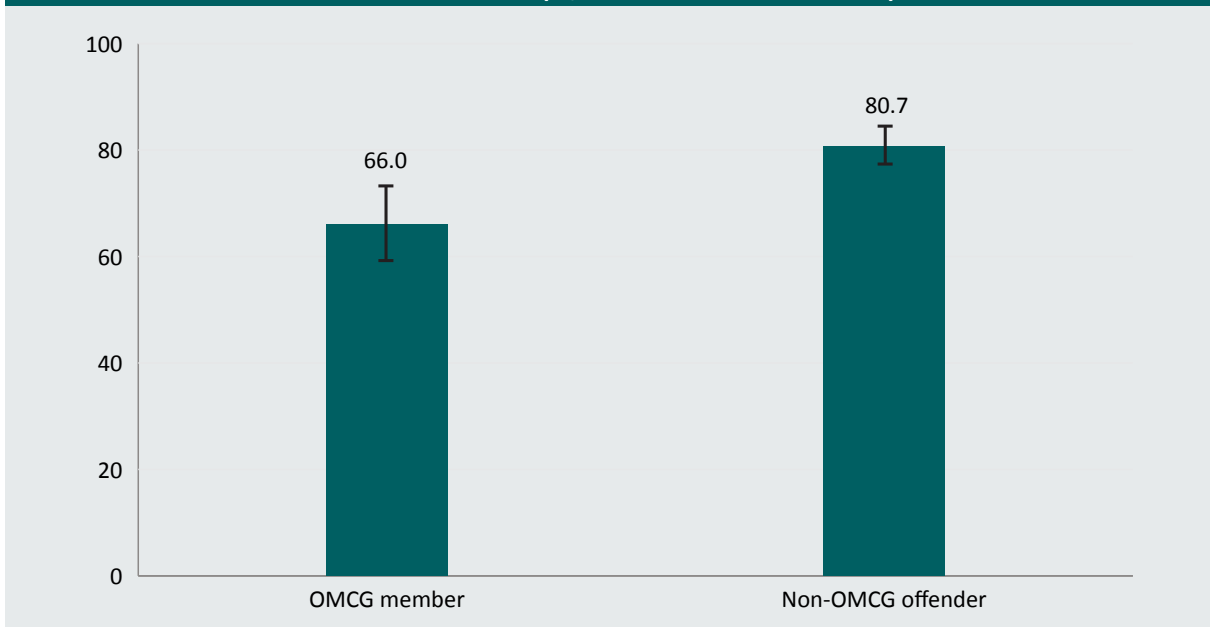
Table 3: Outcomes of finalised matters for violent offences, by OMCG membership (%)

		Domestic violence		Non-domestic violence	
		OMCG members (n=50)	Non-OMCG offenders (n=2,026)	OMCG members (n=107)	Non-OMCG offenders (n=4,074)
Any guilty outcome		78.0	83.3	86.0	73.1
Guilty outcome on first finalised matter		66.0	76.0	56.1	57.2

Source: NSW BOCSAR; NSWPF [dataset]

Finally, we compared the predicted guilty outcomes for the first finalised matter involving one or more domestic violence offences for a matched sample of OMCG members and non-OMCG offenders. This attempts to account for observable differences in the characteristics of matters between the two groups that may have influenced the likelihood of a guilty outcome. The coefficient of difference was 0.15 (-0.29, -0.01), which was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Put differently, as shown in Figure 4, the predicted average guilty rate for OMCG members for their first finalised matter involving at least one domestic violence offence was 66.0 percent, compared with 80.7 percent for non-OMCG members, a difference of 14.7 percentage points. When we repeated the same matching procedure for the first finalised matter involving one or more violent non-domestic offences, there was no difference between OMCG members and non-OMCG offenders in the likelihood of a guilty outcome (coefficient of difference = -0.03, $p = 0.59$). This offers tentative evidence of differential outcomes for OMCG members and non-OMCG offenders proceeded against for domestic violence offences while accounting for observed differences between groups.

Figure 4: Comparison of predicted guilty outcomes for finalised domestic violence matters among OMCG members and non-OMCG offenders (% , 95% confidence intervals)



Note: $n=50$ OMCG members. Nearest neighbour matching was repeated with between one and five matches per case, with all iterations falling below the threshold for statistical significance. One-to-one matching was chosen to minimise standardised differences between groups (for variables that were not exact matches). Standardised differences between matched groups did not exceed 0.06, well within the acceptable range (Apel & Sweeten 2010; Rosenbaum & Rubin 1985). We allowed for replacement, which means the same case in the non-OMCG group could be matched to multiple OMCG members. Average treatment effect on the treated was calculated

Source: NSW BOCSAR; NSWPF [dataset]

Discussion

In this paper we explored the prevalence and patterns of recorded domestic violence offending among OMCG members in New South Wales, and then compared these with other male offenders. This involved two distinct but related studies. The first analysed data on the recorded criminal history of all active OMCG members known to NSWPF. The second compared a subsample of these individuals with male offenders who were not affiliated with an OMCG, using the recorded criminal history of all male offenders in New South Wales born in or after 1984 who committed their first offence in 2008–09.

Results from both studies revealed a high rate of recorded domestic violence offending among OMCG members. Overall, 40.1 percent of members had a recorded history of domestic violence offending in the past 10 years. The prevalence and frequency of domestic violence offending among OMCG members was also higher than among the general male offending population. In fact, OMCG members were more than twice as likely as other offenders to have had at least one domestic violence offence. Domestic violence offending by OMCG members was also, on average, more harmful than the offences perpetrated by other male offenders, once multiple related offences were considered. Similar differences emerged in relation to the prevalence, frequency and harm of violent non-domestic offences. At the same time, OMCG members accounted for a minority of the domestic violence offenders in the sample.

The reliance on recorded crime data undoubtedly underestimates the true extent of OMCG-related domestic violence. Likewise, limiting our comparison to OMCG members and other men with a recorded criminal history likely narrows the difference in rates of domestic violence offending, given OMCG members are nearly three times more likely than the general male population to come into contact with the criminal justice system (Morgan, Dowling & Voce 2020). Further, given OMCG members were also five times as likely to have been imprisoned on at least one occasion, the rate of offending during free time is also probably higher again for OMCG members. Nevertheless, this research shows that the partners of OMCG members are at an elevated risk of domestic violence. The findings from these studies are consistent with high-profile reports of serious acts of violence perpetrated by known OMCG members, and with emerging Australian (Cooper 2004; Queensland Police Service 2021) and international (Van Deuren et al. 2021) research. This may be due to the hyper-masculine culture that characterises OMCGs and the fact that members are known to hold attitudes that adhere to traditional gender norms, which are associated with violence against women (McCarthy, Mehta & Haberland 2018). Risk factors for gang involvement (and violence), such as substance use, exposure to violence and associated trauma, and adverse childhood experiences (Boland et al. 2021), along with a more general individual propensity for violence among many OMCG members (Lauchs, Bain and Bell 2015), likely also play a role.

Other studies have shown that the rate of offending among OMCG members varies significantly between clubs (Blokland et al. 2019; Morgan, Dowling & Voce 2020). We find similar evidence in this study. While there is a common identity related to OMCG membership, there are variations between clubs and chapters in their internal culture, which influences recruitment practices and the profile and conduct of members (Dowling et al. 2021). This extends to the propensity of members to perpetrate violence towards their intimate partners. That said, among clubs with at least 50 members, no fewer than one in three members had a recorded history of domestic violence.

We present tentative evidence in this paper of differences in the outcomes of finalised matters between OMCG members and non-OMCG offenders with respect to their likelihood of being found guilty of domestic violence offences. While we note the limitations of our analysis—namely, that we cannot account for unobserved differences between these two groups—there are different explanations for this finding. The first is that police may be more likely to prosecute OMCG members for domestic violence cases because of their gang membership or perceived risk to the victim. However, there was no difference in the likelihood of a guilty outcome for the first finalised matter involving violent non-domestic offences, which suggests this might not be the cause. Another explanation is that OMCGs may be more difficult to prosecute for domestic violence cases because victims may be less likely to cooperate due to intimidation or fear of repercussions from their partner or other club members, especially given the propensity of OMCG members to use violence to protect the image and reputation of their club and its members. Fear of the perpetrator has been shown to be one of the reasons that victims do not support legal action being taken (Birdsey & Snowball 2013; Voce & Boxall 2018). Even in the context of pro-charge policies, this fear may reduce victim cooperation with the legal process and the prospect of a guilty outcome (Dowling et al. 2018). Victim-survivors of OMCG-related domestic violence may experience isolation, trauma and shame as a consequence of their involvement in gangs and the acts of violence perpetrated against them (Cooper 2004), which is also predictive of less criminal justice engagement (Birdsey & Snowball 2013). Further, they may also encounter barriers to justice due to negative perceptions of their involvement in gang-related activity, including crime, and stigma associated with relationships with gang members. Police perceptions of victim-survivors are an important factor in access to justice (Segrave, Wilson & Fitz-Gibbon 2018).

This has important implications for protecting the safety of victim-survivors of domestic violence perpetrated by OMCG members. Inquiries have repeatedly identified that the perceived deficiencies in the criminal justice response to domestic violence reduce the willingness of victim-survivors to seek assistance (State of Victoria 2016; Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce 2021), which inhibits efforts to hold perpetrators accountable. Victim-survivors of OMCG-related domestic violence who are dissatisfied with the criminal justice process may be reluctant to seek help, placing them at risk of further, potentially escalating, violence.

These findings highlight the importance of partnerships between units and task forces responsible for policing OMCGs and specialist units responsible for policing domestic violence. These partnerships would assist with efforts to respond most effectively to incidents of domestic violence and increase access to support services for victim-survivors (Cooper, Anaf & Bowden 2008). There may be scope to raise awareness and understanding of domestic violence and the supports available to victim-survivors among these gang units and officers responding to victims of gang member-related interpersonal violence through training, education and policy reform. Training could be provided to specialist domestic violence units and support services on the unique features of OMCGs which may influence how best to provide tailored support to victim-survivors immersed in OMCG milieus.

There is an intense focus on police reform in relation to how they respond to domestic violence at present. The findings in this paper suggest the response to victims of OMCG-related domestic violence should be one focus of these reforms.

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