Targeting repeat domestic violence: Assessing short-term risk of reoffending

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Repeat domestic violence offending poses a significant challenge for police and other frontline service providers. Recidivist offenders account for a sizeable proportion of overall domestic violence offending and associated harms (Bland & Ariel 2015; Boxall, Rosevear & Payne 2015; Millsteed & Coghlan 2016; Sherman 1992; Sherman et al. 2016).

Given the significant harm associated with repeat domestic violence for victims and their families, preventing the recurrence of domestic violence is vitally important (Cattaneo & Goodman 2005). This requires identifying offenders who are more likely to reoffend, as well as victims who are at greater risk of being revictimised, and targeting responses at these high-risk individuals and relationships.

Both the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children and the Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria describe the important role of risk assessment and risk management frameworks in informing the response to domestic violence victims and offenders (National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2009; State of Victoria 2016). Risk assessment and risk management principles now underpin many aspects of the criminal justice response to domestic violence, from the response by police through to the management of offenders by correctional agencies.
For example, police in several jurisdictions have implemented high-risk domestic violence offender teams which target repeat offenders (Fentiman 2017; NSW Government 2016). Similarly, there has also been a greater focus on programs targeting perpetrators of domestic violence, and recognition of the importance of measures to understand, respond to and manage the risk that a perpetrator will reoffend (Day et al. 2010; Mackay et al. 2015). Integrated responses to domestic violence, which rely on collaboration between criminal justice agencies and other government and non-government service providers, also target those victims who are identified as being at the highest risk of further victimisation (Breckenridge et al. 2016; Trimboli 2017).

Assessing the risk of further violence involving offenders and victims who come into contact with police has required the development of risk assessment tools. These risk assessment tools use factors relating to the incident, offender, victim and relationship history believed to be associated with higher risk of violence. The most common approach combines actuarial risk assessment with professional judgement (State of Victoria 2016; Messing & Thaller 2013). Several risk assessment tools have been developed for police in Australia, including the Risk Assessment Screening Tool in Tasmania, the Domestic Violence Safety Action Tool in New South Wales, and the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Report (the L17 form) in Victoria. Similar tools have been developed overseas. The purpose of these tools is to enable police to make quick decisions about how to respond to protect the safety and welfare of victims of domestic violence, including decisions about detention, bail and the assistance provided to victims (Fitzgerald & Graham 2016).

Validating these instruments typically involves using statistical methods that assess the likelihood that the instrument will produce a higher predicted probability of recidivism for those offenders who go on to commit a further offence, compared with offenders who do not (Millsteed & Coghlan 2016). A meta-analysis of 25 studies (all from outside of Australia) by Messing and Thaller (2013) found that, while there was considerable variation between the different instruments, each tool estimated risk at a rate better than chance. However, the results did not indicate an acceptable ability to discriminate between reoffenders and non-reoffenders (Millsteed & Coghlan 2016). Australian research has proven more promising, with Mason and Julian (2009) and Millsteed & Coghlan (2016) both showing that a model limited to those factors (in the Risk Assessment Screening Tool and L17 forms, respectively) most strongly associated with recidivism could predict reoffending with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

Nevertheless, certain challenges with the identification of high-risk offenders remain. One such challenge is finding a balance between specificity and sensitivity (Messing et al. 2015). Specifically, assessment tools should minimise the likelihood that offenders who go on to reoffend are incorrectly assessed as low risk (a false negative), without increasing the number of false positives (offenders who are assessed as being likely to reoffend who do not) to such a level that it is no longer possible to efficiently target resources at the highest risk offenders. Chalkley and Strang (2017) analysed domestic homicides in Dorset and found that the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment risk assessment protocol failed to correctly classify two-thirds of homicides as high risk, while 99 percent of high-risk assessments resulted in no serious harm. Using information on the risk assessment tool with the highest predictive validity reported by Messing and Thaller (2013), Pease and Roach (2017: 95) illustrate how nearly nine in 10 victims predicted to experience further serious injury or death do not, arguing ‘the “false alarm rate” is a huge problem in resource-strapped organisations like the police’.
This is particularly relevant given the number of domestic violence offenders apprehended by police in Australia every year—equivalent to around one in five of all offenders proceeded against by police (ABS 2017)—as well as the resources required for intensive interventions for high-risk victims or offenders (Agnew-Pauley & Poynton 2017), and the serious injury or death that can occur when a victim does experience further violence (NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team 2015).

Risk assessment tools are designed to assist police and other frontline services to make quick decisions about detaining offenders and the nature of support provided to victims. They do not, however, provide any real indication as to the speed with which these decisions need to be made. Different instruments have been validated based on variable follow-up periods ranging from six months to five years (Messing & Thaller 2013). The accuracy of these tools relates to their ability to predict reoffending sometime within this period—they do not estimate when, nor do they provide an indication of the potential frequency or severity of future violence (Messing & Thaller 2013).

Finally, there are issues related to their implementation by frontline responders. Domestic violence risk assessment tools require officers to collect substantially more information than is the case for other offence types. While this information may assist police decision making beyond the assessment of risk (Mason & Julian 2009), collecting it can be resource intensive. Ringland (2013) and Fitzgerald and Graham (2016) argue that this additional time and resource cost may be for little additional predictive accuracy. While they have been shown to offer more accurate predictions of reoffending than professional judgement alone (Braaf & Sneddon 2007; Van Tongeren, Millsteed & Petry 2016), specialised risk assessment scales have been shown to have similar levels of accuracy to scales designed for general or violent reoffending (Hanson, Helmus & Bourgon 2007), while victims’ assessments of their own risk have been shown to be just as accurate as some tools (Wheller & Wire 2014).

While risk assessment tools for domestic violence are a relatively new development (Messing & Thaller 2013), and there is significant work underway to continue to refine the instruments that exist (State of Victoria 2016), there is merit in looking beyond these instruments to better understand and identify opportunities for intervention and to help inform the response to domestic violence, including by police. The broader repeat victimisation literature offers several important insights. Grove and Farrell (2012) outline 20 key findings from the research into repeat victimisation, some of which have direct relevance to domestic violence. These include that an individual’s risk of becoming a repeat victim is heightened during the period immediately following a victimisation incident, and that the risk of repeat victimisation increases with each subsequent incident. Further, they argue that most recorded crime constitutes repeat victimisation of the same targets, that a small group of victims experience a disproportionate amount of repeat victimisation, and that repeats are disproportionately committed by the same offenders. These latter conclusions are supported by recent systematic reviews, which have confirmed that, across all crime types studied, five percent of victims experience 12 percent of victimisations (O et al. 2017), and 10 percent of offenders are responsible for approximately 40 percent of all crime (Martinez et al. 2017). These findings have important implications for targeting prevention, and reviews of measures to reduce repeat victimisation have repeatedly been shown to reduce overall crime (Grove et al. 2012).
In domestic violence, repeat offending and repeat victimisation frequently intersect, whereby a current or former partner repeatedly offends against the same victim. Unlike many other crime types, where the target of an offence is unlikely to know the offender, the heightened risk of repeat domestic violence victimisation (and repeat offending) is largely a consequence of the relationship that exists between the offender and the victim, and the opportunities this provides for repeated acts of violence (Farrell, Phillips & Pease 1995).

There are different explanations, however, for why the risk of violence remains elevated following a domestic violence incident. It may reflect the frequent, repeated acts of violence perpetrated by a violent, controlling partner (Johnson 2006). It might also be a consequence of the situational factors or stressful events experienced by an offender, victim or couple that were present during the initial act of violence—such as the excessive consumption of alcohol (Marcus & Braaf 2007), separation or infidelity (perceived or actual), the male partner losing his employment and the female partner obtaining employment (Krishnan et al. 2010; Riger & Staggs 2004; Roberts et al. 2011), the death of a loved one (Roberts et al. 2011), pregnancy (Devries et al. 2010) or the birth of a child (Bowen et al. 2005). Reoffending may be driven by the offender’s desire to seek revenge on the victim, retaliating against the victim’s perceived transgression of contacting the police and getting them in trouble (Felson, Ackerman & Gallagher 2005). Finally, it might be a function of the criminal justice response—specifically, repeat offences that relate to a breach of a protection order, which may or may not coincide with other offences.

Irrespective of the cause, understanding patterns of repeat domestic violence victimisation and offending may assist with targeting responses. Recent Australian research has demonstrated that a relatively small cohort of offenders is responsible for a disproportionate number of domestic violence incidents, while a relatively small proportion of victims experience a disproportionate amount of harm (Kerr, Whyte & Strang 2017; Millsteed & Coghlan 2016; Sherman et al. 2016). This is consistent with research overseas (Barnham, Barnes & Sherman 2017; Bland & Ariel 2015). Risk assessment studies have shown that one of the strongest indicators of future offending is prior offending, including prior violence and breaches of violence orders (Dowling et al. forthcoming; Hilton et al. 2004; Klein & Tobin 2008; Mason & Julian 2009; Millsteed & Coghlan 2016). Importantly, a number of recent studies have also examined the conditional probability of reoffending for dyads (pairs of offenders and victims) (Barnham, Barnes & Sherman 2017; Bland & Ariel 2015; Kerr, Whyte & Strang 2017). All of these studies have found that the likelihood of reoffending increases with each subsequent offence or police call-out. There is some evidence that the time taken to reoffend decreases with each subsequent offence (Barnham, Barnes & Sherman 2017; Bland & Ariel 2015; Kerr, Whyte & Strang 2017; Mele 2009), although there are limitations to this analysis—most notably, the observation period reduces with each subsequent event, which constrains the period in which reoffending may be detected.

Relatively little literature has focused on when reoffending is most likely to occur, and how this might change over time. Lloyd, Farrell and Pease (1994) analysed 14 months of domestic violence related calls for assistance to Merseyside Police (UK) and found that after an initial incident, one-third (35%) of households called police again for assistance within five weeks, and after the second incident almost half (45%) called again within five weeks. In their discussion of the findings, the authors suggested that this ‘gives a good indication of where resources can be deployed to prevent crime and
detect perpetrators’ (Lloyd, Farrell & Pease 1994: 3). Similarly, Poynton, Stavrou, Marott and Fitzgerald (2016) found that, while only a minority of Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders in New South Wales were breached while they were in effect, breaches most frequently occurred in the months after the order had been issued. Taken together, this suggests there ‘exists a “heightened risk period” for repeat domestic victimisation’ in the period following an incident (Lloyd, Pease & Farrell 1994: 3).

This brief summary suggests there is a need to explore the temporal dimensions of repeat domestic violence victimisation and offending and, in particular, focus on the period immediately following a domestic violence incident. Understanding the timing of future violence has important implications for police and other frontline services, with victims and offenders who are at higher risk of immediate violence able to be prioritised for intervention.

Aim and method

The overall aim of this research was to assist frontline police and other service providers to more effectively target perpetrators and survivors of domestic violence who may be at increased risk in the period immediately following a domestic violence incident.

The research focused on developing a better understanding of the temporal dimensions of domestic violence reoffending. It aimed to address the following research questions:

• What proportion of domestic violence offenders reoffend in the period immediately following a domestic violence incident?
• To what extent is prior domestic violence offending associated with an increased likelihood of short-term reoffending?
• Are domestic violence offenders more likely to offend with each subsequent offence?

This involved the analysis of data extracted from the Family Violence Management System (FVMS) maintained by Tasmania Police. The FVMS is a purpose built database that stores information on all domestic violence incidents that are reported to Tasmania Police and result in a call-out. Domestic violence incidents do not have to result in an arrest or charge to be included in the FVMS (Boxall, Payne & Rosevear 2015).

The definition of domestic violence underpinning this study is provided by Tasmania’s Family Violence Act 2004. Under the Act, domestic violence (referred to in the Act as family violence) means any of the following types of conduct committed by a person, directly or indirectly, against that person’s past or current spouse or partner:

• assault (including sexual assault);
• threats, coercion, intimidation or verbal abuse;
• abduction;
• stalking;
• economic abuse (eg withholding money);
• emotional abuse or intimidation; or
• contravening an external Family Violence Order (FVO), an interim FVO, an FVO or a Police Family Violence Order.
The current study examines short-term reoffending among 1,099 offenders who were involved in a domestic violence incident attended by police. These offenders were followed for a six-month period following this initial incident (i.e., all offenders were followed for the same length of time). The first domestic violence incident recorded for each unique offender is referred to as the ‘index incident’. Data on the criminal histories of offenders for the five years prior to the first incident were also analysed to understand the relationship between prior and repeat offending.

**Limitations**

There are limitations to this study. The first is that it relies on incidents reported to police. There are many reasons why domestic violence offences are not reported to police, meaning that recorded crime data only provides the ‘tip of the iceberg’ (Boxall, Payne & Rosevear 2015; Gracia 2004; McPhedran & Baker 2012). The current study will therefore likely underestimate actual reoffending, as well as prior violence between partners. Importantly, one of the strengths of the FVMS database is that it is not limited to offences but includes all domestic violence incidents that come to the attention of police.

Restricting the sample to offenders apprehended by police in a six-month period was necessary due to the limits of available data. It did, however, result in a relatively small sample, which limited some of the analysis that might otherwise have been possible. It is also important to consider the implications of the follow-up period in terms of the estimated rate of reoffending—the longer offenders are observed, the more repeat offending will be detected, albeit with diminishing marginal returns (Farrell, Sousa & Weisel 2002). Interventions targeting short-term reoffending, which is the focus of the current study, should not be at the expense of programs designed to reduce reoffending more generally.

Finally, custodial data were not available for offenders in the sample, meaning that it was not possible to account for time spent in custody during the observation period. Periods spent in custody reduce an offender’s free time to commit further offences. This may affect estimates of both the time to and prevalence of short-term reoffending. There is some evidence that accounting for custodial episodes has limited impact on the results of recidivism analyses; however, the effect is more noticeable for violent offending and for shorter follow-up periods (Ferrante, Loh & Maller 2009).

**Findings**

**What proportion of offenders reoffend in the period immediately following a domestic violence incident?**

The first step was to determine the prevalence of short-term reoffending among domestic violence offenders observed for a six-month period following the index incident (n=1,099). Characteristics of the sample of domestic violence offenders included in this component of the study are presented in Table 1. The majority of offenders included in the sample were male (85%), while three in five offenders (60%) were aged 35 years and younger.
Survival analysis was used estimate the cumulative rate of reoffending at each time point following the index incident (Figure 1). Overall, nearly one-quarter (23%, n=255) of the offenders in the sample were involved in at least one more domestic violence incident in the six months following the index incident. Rates of reoffending at key intervals were as follows:

- one in 20 offenders (5%, n=59) committed their first reoffence within 14 days of the index incident;
- eight percent of offenders (n=92) committed their first reoffence within 30 days of the index incident;
- one in seven offenders (14%, n=151) committed their first reoffence within 60 days of the index incident; and
- sixteen percent of offenders (n=180) committed their first reoffence within 90 days of the index incident.

These results show that, while the majority of offenders will not be involved in another domestic violence incident in the six months following their index incident, a significant proportion of offenders will come into contact with police again in a matter of months, if not weeks. The reoffending rate at six months (23%) is similar to the rate reported by the Crime Statistics Agency (21%; Van Tongeren, Millsteed & Petry 2016) in their analysis for the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.

Further, given the relatively small increase in reoffending between 60 and 90 days (two percentage points), these results suggest that particular emphasis should be placed on the first two months following a domestic violence incident. The likelihood of reoffending declines over time. Reducing or even delaying reoffending within this window may offer significant benefits in terms of the number of victims who might otherwise be affected.
Of the offenders who were apprehended for a subsequent domestic violence incident, the vast majority offended against the same victim (Table 2). Ninety-one percent of offenders who reoffended committed their first reoffence against the same victim, while 89 percent of offenders reoffended against the same victim in each subsequent incident within the six-month follow-up period.

Eight percent of offenders reoffended multiple times in the six months following the index incident. Offenders who reoffended more quickly were more likely to be involved in multiple incidents. The median number of days to the first reoffence was significantly lower for individuals who reoffended more than once than it was for offenders who committed a single reoffence (34 days vs 59 days; $z=3.594, p<0.001$). Similarly, offenders who reoffended within the first 60 days after the index incident were significantly more likely to commit multiple reoffences than those offenders who committed their first reoffence after 60 days (41% vs 20%; $\chi^2(1)=12.21, p<0.001$, Cramer's $V=0.22$). This further reinforces the importance of intervening in the first two months following an incident.

| Table 2: Characteristics of short-term reoffending (six-month follow-up) |
|-----------------|---|---|
| **Total reoffences** | n | % |
| None | 844 | 77 |
| One | 172 | 16 |
| Two | 51 | 5 |
| Three or more | 32 | 3 |
| **Victim (first repeat incident)** | | |
| Same victim | 232 | 91 |
| Different victim | 23 | 9 |
| **Total victims** | | |
| One | 227 | 89 |
| Two | 27 | 11 |
| Three | 1 | <1 |

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding

Source: Tasmania Police FVMS 2010-11 [computer file]
To what extent is prior domestic violence offending associated with an increased likelihood of short-term reoffending?

Consistent with the focus on repeat victims and offenders, the next step was to examine the relationship between prior offending and short-term domestic violence reoffending. Unlike previous studies exploring the predictive validity of risk assessment instruments (Hilton et al. 2004; Mason & Julian 2009), which have tended to limit offending/victimisation history data to lifetime variables (although not always, eg Millsteed & Coghlan 2016), the current study focuses on different measures of reoffending—whether the offender had been apprehended for any prior domestic violence incidents (within the last five years), the number of prior incidents, and the timing of the most recent incident. Both prior incidents and prior breaches of violence orders were examined.

The relationship between prior offending and the dependent variable—a domestic violence reoffence within 180, 60 or 30 days of the index event—was examined using chi-square tests of association, while unadjusted odds ratios are presented to enable comparison between groups. A statistically significant result, indicated by a p-value of less than 0.05, means that the probability of the observed difference being due to chance or error is less than five percent. The strength of the association was measured using Cramer’s V, a value between zero and one where a score of 0.1 indicates a small effect size, a score of 0.3 indicates a medium effect size, and a score of 0.5 or more indicates a large effect size.

Offenders who had been apprehended for a domestic violence incident in the five years prior to the index incident were significantly more likely to reoffend within 180 days (30% vs 18%; $\chi^2(1)=19.11$, $p<0.001$, Cramer’s V=0.13), 60 days (17% vs 11%; $\chi^2(1)=7.47$, $p<0.01$, Cramer’s V=0.08) and 30 days (10% vs 7%; $\chi^2(1)=3.97$, $p<0.05$, Cramer’s V=0.06). The odds of an offender with a prior domestic violence incident reoffending within 180, 60 or 30 days were 1.9, 1.6 and 1.5 times the odds for an offender without a prior history, respectively.

There was also a significant relationship between the number of prior incidents and reoffending within 180 days ($\chi^2(2)=23.80$, $p<0.001$, Cramer’s V=0.15), 60 days ($\chi^2(2)=8.97$, $p<0.05$, Cramer’s V=0.09) and 30 days ($\chi^2(2)=8.55$, $p<0.05$, Cramer’s V=0.09). As shown in Table 3, offenders with four or more prior incidents were significantly more likely to reoffend at each interval—36 percent reoffended within 180 days, 20 percent within 60 days, and 15 percent within 30 days. The odds of an offender with four or more prior incidents reoffending within 180 days, 60 days and 30 days were 2.5, 2.0 and 2.3 times the odds of offenders with no prior incidents, respectively. These odds were consistently higher than those for offenders with one to three prior incidents. The results suggest that the frequency of prior violence is a better indicator of short-term reoffending than prior violence more generally.

Similarly, having been apprehended for breaching a protection order within the last five years was associated with an increased likelihood of reoffending within 180 days (33% vs 21%; $\chi^2(1)=14.36$, $p<0.001$, Cramer’s V=0.11), 60 days (19% vs 13%; $\chi^2(1)=5.73$, $p<0.05$, Cramer’s V=0.07) and 30 days (13% vs 7%; $\chi^2(1)=8.46$, $p<0.01$, Cramer’s V=0.09). The odds of an offender apprehended for a breach offence in the past five years reoffending within 180 days was 1.9 times the odds of an offender with no prior breaches. For reoffending within 60 days, the odds ratio was 1.6 and, for 30 days, the odds ratio was 2.0.
There was a significant relationship between the number of prior breaches and reoffending at 180 days ($\chi^2(2)=15.39$, $p<0.001$, Cramer’s $V=0.12$) and at 30 days ($\chi^2(2)=8.54$, $p<0.05$, Cramer’s $V=0.09$). The results for reoffending at 60 days fell just below the threshold for statistical significance. However, knowing the number of prior breaches provided limited additional information with respect to the likelihood of further offending. The only exception was that 36 percent of offenders with multiple prior breaches in the previous five years reoffended within 180 days (OR=2.1), compared with 30 percent of offenders with one prior breach (OR=1.6) and 21 percent with no prior breaches.

### Table 3: Reoffending rates, by prior domestic violence incidents and prior breaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>180 days</th>
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<th>Unadj. OR (CI)</th>
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<th>Unadj. OR (CI)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
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<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prior domestic violence incidents (past 5 years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No prior incidents</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–3 prior incidents</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.6 (1.2–2.3)**</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.5 (1.0–2.2)*</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 or more prior incidents</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.5 (1.7–3.9)***</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.0 (1.2–3.3)***</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prior breaches of violence orders (past 5 years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No prior breaches</td>
<td>880</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 prior breach</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.6 (1.1–2.5)*</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.6 (1.0–2.8)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more prior breaches</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.1 (1.4–3.3)***</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.6 (0.9–2.7)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,099</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***$p<0.001$; **$p<0.01$; *$p<0.05$

Note: Unadj. OR=unadjusted odds ratios; CI=confidence interval
Source: Tasmania Police FVMS 2010-11 [computer file]

Overall, the results confirm the importance of prior offending, particularly more frequent prior domestic violence, as a predictor of short-term reoffending. They also illustrate, however, the limitations of relying on retrospective assessments of risk based on a single event. Around one in five offenders with no prior incidents reoffended within six months, while more than two-thirds of offenders with a prior history of violence did not.

**Are domestic violence offenders more likely to offend with each subsequent offence?**

Up to this point, this analysis has focused on the first repeat offence perpetrated by an offender after the index incident recorded by police. However, there are offenders who were involved in multiple domestic violence incidents within the observation period. One of the main hypotheses of this paper was that, consistent with the broader repeat victimisation literature, the risk of domestic violence offenders reoffending does not remain stable. Understanding whether domestic violence offenders are more likely to offend following each subsequent incident is important because of the potential implications for the targeting, timeliness and intensity of the response by police and partner agencies.

The results show that the risk of reoffending is cumulative (Figure 2). While 14 percent of offenders reoffended within 60 days of the index incident, more than one-quarter of those offenders (28%; n=42) went on to commit a second reoffence within 60 days of the first reoffence. Nearly half of this cohort (43%; n=18) went on to commit a third reoffence within the next 60 days. Those who committed three reoffences within three consecutive 60-day periods represent only two percent of the original sample of domestic violence offenders.
Similar patterns emerge when the time intervals between offences were reduced to 30 days, although the numbers become relatively small. Eight percent (n=92) of offenders committed their first reoffence within 30 days of the index incident, 16 percent (n=15) went on to commit their second reoffence within 30 days of the first reoffence, and half (47%; n=8) went on to commit a third reoffence within the following 30 days.

To determine whether the observed pattern in repeat offending was associated with the criminal justice response to the index incident and each subsequent incident—namely, the issuing of protection orders—further analysis excluded those incidents that resulted in an offender being charged with a breach of order and no other offences. The reoffending rates at the first, second and third reoffences were 11 percent, 30 percent and 47 percent, respectively. This suggests that the elevated risk of reoffending at each subsequent reoffence was not associated with the criminal justice response—or at least the issuing of a protection order.

**Discussion**

Considerable attention has been given to the problem of high-risk and repeat domestic violence offenders; however, there have been limited attempts to draw upon the broader repeat victimisation literature, despite the significant opportunities for prevention. The results from this study show that a substantial proportion of offenders were involved in at least one more incident in the months following a domestic violence incident. Offenders who reoffended more quickly were more likely to be involved in multiple incidents. Repeat incidents most often involved the same victim.
Based on bivariate analyses, prior domestic violence history and prior breaches of violence orders were associated with an increased likelihood of short-term reoffending. Any prior non-compliance with breach orders and frequent prior domestic violence incidents appeared to be the best predictors of short-term reoffending, particularly in the 60 days following the index incident. However, the risk of short-term reoffending is not static. Further analyses showed that, not only do a significant proportion of offenders reoffend relatively quickly, the likelihood that they will reoffend again increases with each subsequent incident. The rate of reoffending among those who had already committed one reoffence following the index incident doubled, irrespective of the time frame (60 or 30 days), while nearly half of those offenders who committed a second reoffence went on to commit a third reoffence.

These findings have important implications for frontline responders. The findings here replicate the results of repeat victimisation studies for other crime types, as well as research conducted in the United Kingdom by Lloyd, Farrell and Pease (1994) on domestic violence offenders, and add further insight into recent findings on the conditional probability of domestic violence reoffending (Barnham, Barnes & Sherman 2017; Bland & Ariel 2015; Kerr, Whyte & Strang 2017).

Taken as a whole, the results point to the need for responses that focus on repeat victimisation and offending and that are timely, targeted and graduated. There is a high-risk period for further violence in the weeks and months following a domestic violence incident, and offenders who reoffend more quickly are more likely to reoffend more often. Timely responses are required to reduce the elevated risk of further violence in the short term. The results also reiterate the importance of targeting the most prolific repeat offenders—those most likely to reoffend, reoffend more quickly and reoffend multiple times—because they are responsible for a disproportionate amount of harm. Knowing when the most recent incident occurred, and whether there have been one or more prior incidents in recent months, is vital to knowing which offenders and which victims to target. This requires more active monitoring of recent, repeated incidents of domestic violence. Finally, the results of this study demonstrate that the intensity of the response provided by frontline services including the police should be graduated, and increase with each subsequent incident (Hanmer, Griffiths & Jerwood 2009; Morgan 2004).

**Further research and replication studies**

The limitations of this study have already been noted. Further work is needed to explore the correlates of short-term reoffending, particularly in terms of whether the predictors of short-term reoffending are consistent with those of longer follow-up periods. Further work is also needed to verify the generalisability of these findings to other jurisdictions and to larger samples of offenders. Replicating this analysis with other cohorts may provide further insights into the patterns, characteristics and correlates of short-term reoffending and potential opportunities for intervention. Finally, the effectiveness of the intervention approach and measures described in this paper should be assessed in terms of their impact on short-term reoffending.
Conclusion

The current study aimed to provide new insights into the targeting of high-risk domestic violence offenders and victims, drawing upon the broader repeat victimisation literature. The findings have important implications for police and other frontline agencies responding to domestic violence, demonstrating the importance of addressing repeat victimisation and offending through timely, targeted and graduated responses.

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