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Deborah W. Denno

University of Pennsylvania, DDENNO@law.fordham.edu

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VICTIM, OFFENDER, AND SITUATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF VIOLENT CRIME*

Deborah W. Denno**

The purpose of this study was to examine victim, offender, and situational characteristics of violent and repeat offense behavior in two ways. First, possible differences between one-time offenders and repeat offenders on select victim, offender, and situational characteristics associated with the first victim-related offense were assessed. Second, those characteristics which were the strongest predictors of repeat offense behavior with a victim as compared to victimless repeat offense behavior were pinpointed. One-time offenders were defined as those who engage in no other offenses after their first victim-related offense; repeat offenders engaged in at least one other offense after their first victim-related offense.

A considerable amount of research exists on victim and offender characteristics in different kinds of crimes.¹ More recently,

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** Research Associate and Lecturer Sellin Center for Studies in Criminology and Criminal Law, The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania, 1982; M.A., University of Toronto, 1975; B.A., University of Virginia, 1974.

¹ M. AMIR, PATTERNS IN FORCIBLE RAPE (1971); W. McDONALD, CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND THE VICTIM (1976); NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE CAUSES AND PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE, CRIMES OF VIOLENCE: A STAFF REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE CAUSES AND PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE (1969); S. SCHAFER, THE VICTIM AND HIS CRIMINAL: A STUDY IN FUNCTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY (1968); R. SPARKS, RESEARCH ON VICTIMS OF CRIME: ACCOMPLISHMENTS, ISSUES, AND NEW DIRECTIONS (National Institute of Mental Health, Center for Studies of Crime and Delinquency, 1982); H. VON HENTIG, THE CRIMINAL AND HIS VICTIM: STUDIES IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF CRIME (1948); M. WOLFGANG, PATTERNS IN CRIMINAL HOMICIDE (1958 & reprint 1975); 4 VICTIMOLOGY: A NEW FOCUS (International Symposium on Victimology, I. Drapkin & E. Viano eds. 1975); Avison, *Victims of Homicide*, in 4 VICTIMOLOGY: A NEW FOCUS (International Symposium

research has emphasized the situational aspects of certain offenses that contribute to the initiation of an offense or to the extent of physical harm involved.² Situational factors include the closeness of the victim-offender relationship;³ family income, stress, and stability;⁴ location of the offense;⁵ the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants;⁶ and the availability of weapons.⁷ Few empirical studies, however, have looked at the impact of situational factors on serious crime.⁸ Moreover, no study has investigated in detail the interrelationships among individual characteristics of the offender, individual characteristics of the victim, and situational aspects of the offense in predicting future violent crime.

The examination of offenses rather than offenders in past research often overlooked the importance of offender characteristics and background. Indeed, a growing body of research suggests that the biological or psychological characteristics of offenders may strongly influence the outcome of particular encounters or future offense behavior.⁹ For instance, offenders with poor verbal ability or low school achievement scores may be more prone to repeat confrontational violence, irrespective of the characteristics of the victim or the situation of the offense. Thus, it is important to distinguish between those offenders with short or repeat offense histories, and those offenses which do or do not involve personal confrontation with a victim.

on Victimology, I. Drapkin & E. Viano eds. 1975); Wolfgang, *Basic Concepts in Victimological Theory: Individualization of the Victim*, in *THE VICTIM IN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE* (H. Schneider ed. 1982); A. Normandeau, *Trends and Patterns in Crimes of Robbery* (1968) (dissertation, University of Pennsylvania).

² Monahan & Klassen, *Situational Approaches to Understanding and Predicting Individual Violent Behavior*, in *CRIMINAL VIOLENCE* 295 (M. Wolfgang & N. Weiner eds. 1982).

³ M. AMIR, *supra* note 1; Weiner & Wolfgang, *The Extent and Character of Violent Crime in America, 1969 to 1982*, in *AMERICAN VIOLENCE AND PUBLIC POLICY* (L. Curtis ed. 1985); M. WOLFGANG, *supra* note 1.

⁴ Humphrey & Palmer, *Stressful Life Events and Criminal Homicide: Offender-Victim Relationships*, 5 *VICTIMOLOGY* 115 (1980); D. Denno, *Sex Differences in Cognition and Crime: Early Developmental, Biological and Sociological Correlates* (1982) (dissertation, University of Pennsylvania).

⁵ S. SCHAFFER, *supra* note 1.

⁶ For a review, see R. SPARKS, *supra* note 1.

⁷ Berkowitz & LePage, *Weapons as Aggression-Eliciting Stimuli*, 7 *J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOLOGY* 202 (1967); Buss, Booker & Buss, *Firing a Weapon and Aggression*, 22 *J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOLOGY* 296 (1972); Cook, *The Effect of Gun Availability on Violent Crime Patterns*, 455 *ANNUALS* 63 (1981).

⁸ One exception is M. WOLFGANG, *supra* note 1, and the sizeable research on the death penalty.

⁹ J. WILSON & R. HERRNSTEIN, *CRIME AND HUMAN NATURE* (1985); Denno, *Sociological and Human Developmental Explanations of Crime: Conflict or Consensus?*, 23 *CRIMINOLOGY* 711 (1985); Mednick, Pollock, Volavka & Gabrielli, *Biology and Violence*, in *CRIMINAL VIOLENCE* 21 (M. Wolfgang & N. Weiner eds. 1982).

This paper focuses on violent or serious victim-offender confrontations. It is expected that repeat offenders will have relatively more disadvantaged personal and background characteristics than first-time offenders, and that in comparison these characteristics will be stronger predictors of their offense behavior than victim and situational influences.

In the present study "offender" and "situational" variables are distinguished temporally. "Offender" variables comprise biological, psychological, sociological or behavioral measures gathered independently of the offense event (e.g., achievement test scores) or at a time preceding the offense event (e.g., intelligence test scores and per capita income at an early age). "Victim" and "situational" variables comprise victim characteristics and the situational or environmental characteristics that may contribute to the offense event (e.g., the victim-offender relationship or the presence of a weapon). Some situational characteristics may be more immediate than others, (e.g., a gun may appear instantly, whereas an offender may have known a victim for many years). In these cases, the distinction between "person" and "situation" becomes blurred. All variables in this study, however, are analyzed simultaneously so that any possible associations that occur between variable types may be recognized.

I. METHOD

A. SUBJECTS

Sixty black male juvenile offenders were selected for this study from a sample of 151 black male offenders whose mothers participated in the Philadelphia Collaborative Perinatal Project at Pennsylvania Hospital between 1959 and 1962. Pennsylvania Hospital was one of twelve medical centers included by the National Institute for Neurological Diseases and Stroke in a nationwide study of genetic, biological and environmental influences on child development.¹⁰ Thus, the total sample reflects, in part, the characteristics of children born to a self-selected group of women interested in receiving inexpensive maternity care.

The sample of sixty juvenile offenders was selected according to the following criteria: (1) attended a Philadelphia public school; (2) stayed in Philadelphia from ages 10 through 17; (3) received selected intelligence tests at ages 4 and 7 (plus or minus six months) and achievements tests at ages 13 and 14; and (4) were not among

¹⁰ For a description of the study, see K. NISWANDER & M. GORDON, *THE WOMEN AND THEIR PREGNANCIES* (1972).

sibling members excluded from the sample to prevent possible biases in multiple family membership. The sixty offenders experienced at least one police contact that involved a non-institutional victim or a police officer. Thus, offenses such as shoplifting, burglarizing an empty building or stealing from a member of the police officers' "granny squad," for instance, were not included in the analyses.¹¹

B. INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Means and standard deviations of independent and dependent variables selected for the analyses are shown in Table 1. Variables pertain to victim, offender, and situational characteristics of the first victim-related offense.

Two dependent variables were used in the analyses. The primary dependent variable, "Repeat Offense," measured whether or not an offender had a subsequent offense after his first offense involving a victim. One-time offenders were defined as those individuals who had no subsequent offense after their first offense involving a victim; repeat offenders included those individuals who had one or more subsequent offenses after their first offense involving a victim. These subsequent offenses may or may not have involved a victim. The great majority of these offenses were violent or serious confrontations. The second dependent variable, "Repeat Offense with Victim," measured whether or not an offender had a subsequent victim-related offense after his first offense involving a victim. Thus, this dependent measure differs from the primary dependent measure in one respect: repeat offenders consisted only of those individuals whose subsequent offenses involved a victim.

Measures of violent crime were based on official police record data collected by the Sellin Center for Studies in Criminology and Criminal Law at the University of Pennsylvania. Data were collected in Philadelphia for all study subjects from age seven up to age eighteen. Police records specify the nature of the offense (e.g., injury, theft, or damage), the number of offenders and victims involved, sociodemographic characteristics of victims, types of victim-offender relationships and the presence of a weapon during the offense.

Three different categories of independent variables were examined in this study:

¹¹ The final sample of sixty offenders included for this study were more apt to be repeat offenders and to score less well on some tests of intelligence and achievement. See D. Denno, *Victim, Offender, and Situational Characteristics of Repeat Offense Behavior* (1985) (Paper presented at the Fifth International Symposium on Victimology, Zagreb, Yugoslavia).

1. Victim variables consisted of the number of victims involved in the offense, the victim's age, sex, and race, as well as the discrepancy in age between the victim and the offender.

2. Offender variables comprised the number of offenders involved in the offense, the offender's prior record, age, per capita family income, and disciplinary problems in school. Family stability was indicated by the presence of a father (or other male partner) in the household. Also included were measures of intelligence and achievement: the Verbal IQ and Full Scale IQ WISC administered at age seven and the California Achievement Tests administered at ages thirteen and fourteen.

3. Situational variables constituted the type of victim-offender relationship, offense location, presence of a weapon, as well as the incidence of injury, theft, or damage involved in the offense. As discussed previously, victim variables also contribute to the situational characteristics of the offense.

This study is unique because it examines inherent characteristics of the offender at different developmental periods in addition to more immediate, situational factors which may also influence future offense behavior. Thus, while offender variables may account for a major part of criminal behavior, victim and situational factors may increase the likelihood that such behavior will occur.

II. RESULTS

A. COMPARISONS BETWEEN ONE-TIME AND REPEAT OFFENDERS ON VARIABLES AT THE FIRST VICTIM-RELATED OFFENSE

The results of this study were analyzed in three different ways in order to draw comparisons between one-time and repeat offenders on victim, offender, and situational influences on future offense behavior. First, in Table 1, significant differences were examined between one-time and repeat offenders on those variables that were recorded for their first victim-related offense. These differences show whether the two offender groups vary in their background and offender characteristics. Second, logistic multiple regression models comprising victim, offender, and situational variables were analyzed in order to predict and classify repeat offense status with or without a victim. These models help to determine which characteristics are the most significant predictors of future behavior. Third, the same models were used to predict and classify victim-related, repeat offense status. These results assess whether or not those factors that predict any subsequent behavior also predict subsequent offenses involving a victim.

TABLE 1
COMPARISONS BETWEEN ONE-TIME AND REPEAT OFFENDERS ON VARIABLES AT FIRST VICTIM-RELATED OFFENSE

VARIABLES AT FIRST VICTIM-RELATED OFFENSE	ONE-TIME OFFENDER		REPEAT OFFENDER		<i>t</i>	TOTAL SAMPLE	
	MEAN	(S.D.)	MEAN	(S.D.)		(DF = 58)	MEAN
1. Total Number of Offenses ^f	2.26	(1.51)	6.38	(6.03)	-3.95	4.80	(5.21)
2. Repeat Offense	—	—	1.00	(0)	—	.62	(.49)
0 = No Repeat Offense							
1 = Repeat Offense							
3. Repeat Offense with Victim	—	—	.65	(.48)	—	.40	(.49)
0 = No Repeat Offense							
1 = Repeat Offense with Victim							
4. Prior Offense Record	.61	(.50)	.51	(.51)	.71	.55	(.50)
0 = No Record							
1 = Prior Record							
5. Number of Offenders	1.54	(1.87)	1.54	(1.54)	.01	1.54	(1.66)
6. Offender Age ^b	15.61	(1.41)	14.46	(1.21)	3.35	14.90	(1.40)
7. Offender Full Scale IQ (Total) WISC	92.22	(9.11)	90.59	(10.35)	.62	91.22	(9.84)
8. Offender Verbal IQ WISC ^a	93.78	(9.96)	87.70	(8.40)	2.54	90.03	(9.43)
9. Offender Total Achievement ^a	21.43	(22.00)	11.03	(13.23)	2.05	15.02	(17.74)
10. Offender Language Achievement ^a	25.74	(21.63)	14.30	(15.58)	2.38	18.68	(18.82)
11. Offender Reading Achievement	27.04	(24.87)	17.19	(15.13)	1.71	20.97	(19.84)
12. Offender Disciplinary Problem	.17	(.39)	.22	(.42)	-.39	.20	(.40)
0 = No Problem							
1 = Disciplinary Problem							

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)

VARIABLES AT FIRST VICTIM-RELATED OFFENSE	ONE-TIME OFFENDER		REPEAT OFFENDER		<i>t</i> (DF = 58)	TOTAL SAMPLE	
	MEAN	(S.D.)	MEAN	(S.D.)		MEAN	(S.D.)
13. Offender Father Absence in Family 0 = Father Present 1 = Father Absent	.48	(.51)	.59	(.50)	-.87	.55	(.50)
14. Offender Per Capita Family Income (1970 dollars)	1114.21	(586.68)	1011.44	(770.83)	.58	1050.84	(702.45)
15. Number of Victims	1.00	(.00)	1.49	(1.73)	-1.35	1.30	(1.37)
16. Victim Age ^b	38.09	(15.50)	24.57	(15.65)	3.27	29.75	(16.82)
17. Victim-Offender Age Difference ^b	22.48	(16.14)	10.11	(15.43)	2.97	14.85	(16.71)
18. Victim Sex 0 = Male 1 = Female	.48	(.51)	.35	(.48)	.97	.40	(.49)
19. Victim Race 0 = White 1 = Nonwhite	.61	(.50)	.65	(.48)	-.31	.63	(.49)
20. Victim Sex by Race 0 = No 1 = Yes							
a. Nonwhite Male ^a	.26	(.45)	.54	(.50)	-2.17	.42	(.50)
b. White Male	.22	(.42)	.16	(.37)	.53	.18	(.39)
c. Nonwhite Female	.30	(.47)	.13	(.35)	1.60	.20	(.40)
d. White Female	.22	(.42)	.17	(.39)	-.39	.20	(.40)

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)

VARIABLES AT FIRST VICTIM-RELATED OFFENSE	ONE-TIME OFFENDER		REPEAT OFFENDER		<i>t</i>	TOTAL SAMPLE	
	MEAN	(S.D.)	MEAN	(S.D.)		(DF = 58)	MEAN
21. Victim-Offender Relationship 0 = Nonstranger 1 = Stranger	.70	(.47)	.73	(.45)	-.28	.72	(.45)
22. Offense Location ^a 0 = Outside 1 = Inside	.56	(.51)	.30	(.46)	2.10	.40	(.49)
23. Weapon Present at Offense 0 = No Weapon 1 = Weapon Present	.09	(.29)	.24	(.43)	-1.67	.18	(.39)
24. Injury Involved in Offense ^b 0 = No Injury 1 = Injury	.17	(.39)	.54	(.50)	-2.97	.40	(.49)
25. Theft Involved in Offense 0 = No Theft 1 = Theft	.61	(.50)	.59	(.50)	.11	.60	(.49)
26. Damage Involved in Offense 0 = No Damage 1 = Damage	.26	(.45)	.22	(.42)	.39	.23	(.43)
N			23	37			60

^ap < .05^bp < .01

c p < .001

The significance of the differences between groups was determined using *t*-test statistics.

Table 1 shows that, on the average, one-time offenders had been arrested for at least one other offense before their first offense involving a victim. Compared to one-time offenders, however, repeat offenders averaged nearly three times as many offenses over their juvenile careers. Repeat offenders were also significantly more likely to injure their first victim, to engage in their first victim-related offense at a younger age, to have younger first victims and victims closer to their own age, and to victimize their peers: nonwhite males. Significantly more of their first victim-related offenses occurred inside. Repeat offenders also scored lower on verbal intelligence at age seven and total achievement and language achievement at age fifteen. Although not statistically significant, repeat offenders did score slightly lower on total intelligence at age seven and reading achievement at age fifteen. A higher (though not significant) proportion of repeat offenders was also enrolled in a program for disciplinary problems, had a father absent in the family, came from a family with lower per capita income, and engaged in a higher proportion of offenses involving weapons.

It is interesting to note, however, that repeat offenders did not have a longer prior record before their first victim-related offense, although they were a year younger. Furthermore, repeat and one-time offenders did not differ in their types of victim-offender relationships; most victims were strangers. Some types of the offenses analyzed in the present study, however, have been found in past research to involve victims who are predominately strangers to the offender, (e.g., theft or property offenses¹² and robbery offenses¹³). In contrast, violent offenses (e.g., rape and homicide) have been more likely to involve victims who have a close relationship with the offender.¹⁴

B. PREDICTION OF REPEAT OFFENDER STATUS

Analyses of the significance of each variable in Table 1 provide preliminary information on the importance of individual factors relative to the one-time and repeat offender groups. Determination of the relative importance of all variables examined simultaneously in predicting repeat offense status or in discriminating between one-

¹² Landau, *The Offender's Perception of the Victim*, in 1 VICTIMOLOGY: A NEW FOCUS, (International Symposium on Victimology, I. Drapkin & E. Viano eds. 1974).

¹³ Wiener & Wolfgang, *supra* note 3; Normandeau, *supra* note 1.

¹⁴ M. AMIR, *supra* note 1; M. WOLFGANG, *supra* note 1.

time or repeat offender groups, however, can be best assessed using multivariate methods.

In the present study, predictions and classifications of violent, repeat offense status were determined using the logistic multiple regression method.¹⁵ Predictions were conducted by fitting a series of logistic multiple regression models to a single binary (0-1) dependent variable: "0" represented the group of twenty-three one-time offenders; "1" represented the group of thirty-seven repeat offenders. Independent variables used for prediction and classification are enumerated in Table 1.¹⁶

i. Repeat Offense Status With or Without a Victim

Six stepwise logistic models were computed incorporating sixteen of the independent variables listed in Table 1. Six models were calculated in order to avoid any possible bias due to multicollinearity which might have occurred by including in the same model subsets or total tests of the WISC or the California Achievement Tests.

All models resulted in an insignificant residual chi square, thereby satisfying the requirement that all variables excluded in the stepwise procedure could not significantly contribute to greater discriminating power. Only those models with the best discriminating power and classification rates¹⁷ are reported in Tables 2 and 3.

The three models incorporating Full Scale IQ (Total) WISC had virtually identical results since each of the three achievement

¹⁵ The primary purpose of this regression technique is to classify, using maximum likelihood estimates, each individual in a population according to one of (most commonly) two groups. The logistical regression method is often recommended over other techniques (e.g., discriminant analysis) for assessing ordinal or binary dependent variables because it does not require the assumption of a multinomial distribution for independent variables. For a discussion, see E. LEE, *STATISTICAL METHODS FOR SURVIVAL DATA ANALYSIS* (1980); Press & Wilson, *Choosing Between Logistic Regression and Discriminant Analysis*, 73 *J. AM. STATISTICAL A.* 699 (1978); Walker & Dunne, *Estimation of the Probability of an Event as a Function of Several Independent Variables*, 2 *BIOMETRIKA* 167 (1967).

¹⁶ A backward, stepwise elimination procedure was used to determine the most significant predictors in the model. The stepwise procedure starts first with a regression equation model incorporating all independent variables and then proceeds to eliminate sequentially each variable that provides the least significant gain in discrimination (based on the likelihood ratio test) after adjusting for variables already included in the model. In the present study, significance levels for included independent variables were based at the $p < .1$ level. Maximum-likelihood estimates were computed by the Newton-Raphson method. Logistic multiple regression models were conducted using Harrell's "LOGIST procedure" program in SAS. See F. HARRELL, *THE LOGIST PROCEDURE* (1980).

¹⁷ In all models presented in this paper, those variables significant at the $< .1$ level demonstrated a good classification rate when individuals were assigned to one of the two offender groups. For a presentation and discussion of these results, see D. Denno, *supra* note 11.

tests did not reach the .1 level of significance for inclusion in the model. The final parameter estimates reported in Table 2 demonstrate that evidence of an injury or a theft in the first victim-related offense is the strongest predictor of repeat offense status. Closeness in age between victim and offender and an offender's lower intelligence at an early age, however, are the next strongest predictors, followed by evidence of damage at the offense. Offense location and offender's father absence are relatively weak contributors.

TABLE 2
FINAL PARAMETER ESTIMATES OF LOGISTIC MULTIPLE REGRESSION
(TOTAL INTELLIGENCE) MODEL FOR REPEAT OFFENSE STATUS
WITH OR WITHOUT A VICTIM

VARIABLE	BETA	STANDARD ERROR	CHI-SQUARE
Intercept ^a	11.41	5.47	4.35
Injury Involved ^b	3.49	1.19	8.59
Theft Involved ^a	2.95	1.28	5.26
Damage Involved ^a	2.31	1.12	4.24
Full Scale IQ (Total) WISC ^b	-.15	.06	5.13
Offense Location	-1.79	.90	3.93
Offender Father Absence	1.58	.82	3.68
Victim-Offender Age Difference ^b	-.07	.03	5.14

^ap < .05

^bp < .01

The three models incorporating Verbal IQ WISC had somewhat different results according to which achievement test was included. The model with the best classification rate is shown in Table 3. Looking first at parameter estimates, it can be seen that evidence of an injury at the first victim-related offense, as well as closeness in age between offender and victim, are the strongest predictors of a subsequent offense. Low language achievement and family income, as well as low verbal intelligence, are the next strongest predictors. Evidence of a prior record has only a marginal significant impact.

TABLE 3
FINAL PARAMETER ESTIMATES OF LOGISTIC MULTIPLE REGRESSION
(VERBAL INTELLIGENCE) MODEL FOR REPEAT OFFENSE STATUS
WITH OR WITHOUT A VICTIM

VARIABLE	BETA	STANDARD ERROR	CHI-SQUARE
Intercept	-5.28	4.14	1.62
Victim/Offender Relationship	1.58	.93	2.87
Injury Involved ^b	3.28	1.15	8.18
Verbal IQ WISC ^a	-.10	.05	4.28
Language Achievement ^b	-.10	.04	6.84
Weapon Present at Offense	-2.59	1.43	3.33
Per Capita Family Income ^a	-.002	.001	5.94
Victim-Offender Age Difference ^b	-.08	.03	7.50
Prior Offense Record ^a	-1.88	.95	3.89

^ap < .05

^bp < .01

ii. Victim-Related Offense

The characteristics of repeat offenders, who engaged in at least one victim-related offense, may be considerably different from the characteristics of those individuals who never engaged in another offense or in another victim-related offense. Tables 4 and 5 support this conclusion. As before, six logistic multiple regression models were computed, with the first three models containing the Full Scale IQ (Total) WISC with the three achievement tests and the latter three models containing the Verbal IQ WISC with the different achievement tests.

Results of the three models with the Full Scale IQ (Total) WISC intelligence were very similar, as before, since achievement tests were not strong predictors. Surprisingly, however, the previously strong predictors — offense situation, evidence of theft and damage — were not significant. As Table 4 demonstrates, a lower total intelligence test score is the single most significant predictor of a subsequent offense involving a victim. Evidence of injury in a first victim-related offense is less significant.

TABLE 4
FINAL PARAMETER ESTIMATES OF LOGISTIC MULTIPLE REGRESSION
(TOTAL INTELLIGENCE) MODEL FOR REPEAT OFFENSE STATUS
WITH VICTIM ONLY

VARIABLE	BETA	STANDARD ERROR	CHI-SQUARE
Intercept ^b	8.68	3.35	6.69
Injury Involved ^a	1.22	.62	3.82
Full Scale IQ (Total) WISC ^b	-.10	.04	7.56
Offense Location	-1.16	.66	3.08

^ap < .05^bp < .01

All three models using Verbal IQ WISC showed that evidence of injury, theft, or damage in the first victim-related offense was not a significant predictor of another victim-related offense. In all models, verbal intelligence was the most significant predictor, followed by offense location, as shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5
FINAL PARAMETER ESTIMATES OF LOGISTIC MULTIPLE REGRESSION
(VERBAL INTELLIGENCE) MODEL FOR REPEAT OFFENSE STATUS
WITH VICTIM ONLY

VARIABLE	BETA	STANDARD ERROR	CHI-SQUARE
Intercept ^b	9.35	3.32	7.95
Verbal IQ WISC ^b	-.10	.04	8.02
Offense Location ^a	-1.51	.66	5.34

^ap < .05^bp < .01

III. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

One purpose of this study was to assess the differences between one-time and repeat offenders according to select victim, offender, and situational characteristics associated with their first victim-related offense. A second purpose was to determine which characteristics were the strongest predictors of repeat offense status with and without a victim.

The sample consisted of sixty black male juvenile delinquents whose offense histories were analyzed for ages ten through seventeen. Altogether, sixty-two percent of the sample consisted of re-

peat offenders and nearly two-thirds of the repeat offenders engaged in another victim-related offense. It was expected that repeat offenders would have more disadvantaged personal and background characteristics than one-time offenders and that these characteristics would be relatively strong predictors of a subsequent offense. Results of the present study partly supported these expectations. Repeat offenders showed relatively greater evidence of disadvantage, although other factors also characterized the nature of their first victim-related offense.

Compared to one-time offenders, repeat offenders averaged significantly more offenses over their juvenile career. They were significantly more likely to injure their first victims and to be younger at the time of their first victim-related offense. Repeat offenders were more apt to victimize individuals who were younger or closer to their own age and who were nonwhite males. They scored significantly lower on tests of verbal intelligence at a young age and on tests of total achievement and language during adolescence. Significantly more of their first victim-related offenses occurred inside.

Overall, then, repeat offenders differed significantly from one-time offenders in terms of the nature and severity of their first victim-related offense and in terms of select personal characteristics, such as verbal ability. Repeat offenders did not differ significantly, however, in terms of more sociologically oriented background characteristics, such as family income or stability.

Most of the victims in the present study were strangers both to one-time and repeat offenders. There was some tendency for one-time offenders to victimize what may be considered more vulnerable types of individuals—females of either race—although the differences between repeat offenders on these victim characteristics were not significant. Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest that victim vulnerability is a major incentive to engage in an offense. As Landau reports from his interviews with different kinds of offenders, about one-third of the violent offenders in his study estimated their victims to be equal or even greater in strength than themselves; in turn, the “great majority of property and fraud offenders report that estimation of the victim’s strength was not taken into consideration at all.”¹⁸ The finding in the present study that offenders in both groups were, as a whole, younger than their victims is consistent with previous research on homicides¹⁹ and on offenses ranging from

¹⁸ Landau, *supra* note 12, at 145.

¹⁹ M. WOLFGANG, *supra* note 1.

theft to personal violence.²⁰

Instances of injury or theft in the first victim-related offenses were the strongest predictors of repeat offense status with or without a victim. This result is not surprising, considering that individuals who engage in some types of injury or theft-related crimes are among those most likely to recidivate.²¹ As Olweus also points out, aggressive behavior and reaction patterns within individuals are relatively stable over time.²² Like intelligence, aggressive behavior can be predicted from an early age and it remains consistent over the life span. Thus, juveniles who evidence aggression in one situation are more likely to demonstrate aggression again.

The next strongest predictor of repeat offense behavior was the age discrepancy between the victim and the offender. The smaller the discrepancy, the greater the likelihood of a repeat offense, indicating, perhaps, that offenders who victimize age-related peers possess characteristics that predispose them to future offending. These characteristics may be linked to certain types of intellectual ability because, in the present study, both total and verbal intelligence were negatively associated with repeat offense behavior, (i.e., low levels of ability were the stronger predictors of a subsequent offense). In models using verbal rather than total intelligence, lower language achievement and lower family income followed in predictive ability, whereas prior record had only a moderate impact.

Overall, then, the strongest predictors of repeat offense status were those factors associated with the type or severity of the first victim-related offense, followed by the closeness in age between the offender and the victim and lower total and verbal abilities of the offender. In these models, demographic characteristics of the victim, the type of victim-offender relationship, and other situational components of the offense, such as the presence of a weapon, were not found to be significant. Generally, those factors related to type of offense and personal attributes of the offender were most important.

The predictors of repeat offenses involving victims, however, were quite different. Lower total and verbal intelligence were the strongest of all predictors in their respective models. Situational characteristics of the offense, such as evidence of injury (in the total intelligence models), or outside location of the offense (in the verbal

²⁰ Landau, *supra* note 12.

²¹ L. GREENFIELD, EXAMINING RECIDIVISM (Special Report of the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics 1985).

²² Olweus, *Stability of Aggressive Reaction Patterns in Males: A Review*, 86 PSYCHOLOGICAL BULL. 852 (1979).

intelligence models), were the only other significant predictors and they had less predictive impact. In general, then, the cognitive attributes of the offender, and not characteristics of the situation or the victim, predominate when subsequent offense behavior involves at least one offense with a victim.

The importance of intellectual ability can be interpreted in a number of different but related ways. Crimes with victims are frequently confrontations with distinct patterns of interaction among the individuals involved. The situational dynamics of these interactions have been studied predominately for crimes of violence.²³ It may be assumed, however, that such dynamics are similar for nonviolent crimes because it is most likely the degree, rather than the kind, of human emotion or interactional pattern that varies across types of criminal behavior.

Given that a portion of interpersonal conflicts involve incidents of verbal aggression, it can be expected that those offenders who are less successful verbally may depend on more physically aggressive means of communication.²⁴ Not unexpectedly, poor verbal skills could contribute to inappropriate physical aggression in a number of different interpersonal situations regardless of the types of victim or situational dynamics involved.

Poor verbal ability has also been linked to other offense-related characteristics. For example, some evidence suggests that individuals who score lower on tests of verbal aptitude are more likely to have deficits of the left cerebral hemisphere and consequently rely more on the right cerebral hemisphere in cognitive tasks and behavior. In turn, pathological dominance of the right cerebral hemisphere is more strongly associated with impulsivity, poor planning, and the lack of sequential and analytical thought.²⁵ Although this association between cognition and behavior is considerably more complex than the discussion presented here, it is not unlikely that the impulsive and unplanned behaviors that accompany a disproportionate number of offenses may be related to particular cognitive deficits. Results of the present study support the feasibility of this link by demonstrating that cognitive characteristics of the offender,

²³ M. WOLFGANG, *supra* note 1; M. WOLFGANG & F. FERRACUTI, *THE SUBCULTURE OF VIOLENCE: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED THEORY IN CRIMINOLOGY* (1967 & reprint 1982); Felson & Steadman, *Situational Factors in Disputes Leading to Criminal Violence*, 21 *CRIMINOLOGY* 59 (1983).

²⁴ See M. WOLFGANG & F. FERRACUTI, *supra* note 23.

²⁵ For a review of the literature, see Denno, *Neuropsychological and Early Environmental Correlates of Sex Differences in Crime*, 23 *INT'L J. NEUROSCIENCE* 199 (1984).

assessed at an age prior to the start of delinquency, are the primary determinants of a subsequent offense with a victim.

The limitations of the present study are recognized. Analyses relied solely on official police reports. Consequently, information was not included on victim-offender relationships or the characteristics of crimes that were not reported to the police. Considerable evidence shows that offenses involving a prior victim-offender relationship, such as rape and domestic disputes, are less likely to be reported to the police. Moreover, offenders with long prior records have a higher probability of repeat apprehension. Additional problems with official data have been reviewed in detail elsewhere.²⁶

Another limitation of the study is its reliance on a sample comprised of only black males of predominately lower socioeconomic status; consequently, the results may not be generalizable to other samples. The present study contained no detailed data on personal characteristics of the victim or victim precipitation, so that important predictor variables may have been omitted. Those characteristics of the offender that were included may thus be exaggerated in the extent of their impact. There is, however, limited logic in analyzing some like characteristics of the victim; for instance, should the first victim's verbal ability strongly predict whether an offender will repeat an offense with another victim?

Overall, evidence that personal characteristics of the offender predict more strongly subsequent offense behavior relative to some characteristics of the offense suggests that situational dynamics in certain offenses may not be of overriding importance. It is necessary in future victimology research to include as factors the personal attributes of all parties involved in an offense to assess more accurately the contribution of victim and situational components to repeat offense behavior.

²⁶ For a discussion of other problems related to the analysis of official data, see R. SPARKS, *supra* note 1.