



## Profiling Violent Incidents: An Explorative Study

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### Abstract

The aim of the study was to formulate a profile of incidents inside a high security prison for a period of one year. To this end the study surveyed all the closed files related to the incidents in a high security prison for a period of one year. It was found that inmate assault was the most frequently occurring incident and that there is a relationship between an incident and the index offence of which the inmate has been convicted. The discussion focuses on how this information can be used for effective prisoner management and offender rehabilitation

*Keywords:* Violent Incidents; Prison; Inmates; Violence

### INTRODUCTION

Violence in institutions has been a subject of much research interest. The driving force behind the research has been the quest to uncover the predictors of violent behaviours. In this regard a great deal of research has focused on:

1. The perpetrator of violence / offender characteristics. Eg the presence of mental illness (Asnis et al 1997; Swanson et al 1998; Modestein et al 1998)
2. The environment in which violence is perpetrated. (Gudjonsson et al 1999; Owen et al 1998; Agrawal and Roberts 1996)

The current study on the other hand is an attempt (albeit explorative) to profile violent incidents within the prison based on the perpetrator's offending profile.

This study is also an attempt to examine the degree to which violent incidents may affect the functioning of a high security Australian prison.

An incident inside the prison is defined as any event, which hampers its smooth and efficient functioning. Incidents therefore range from

breakdown of an official car when carrying a group of prisoners, to the taking of some officers as hostages by a group of prisoners.

The study considers only those incidents which have been resolved i.e. considered as 'closed files' as opposed to those which were unresolved i.e. considered as 'open files'.

### AIM

- a) To profile all the incidents within the prison in order to study the degree to which violent incidents affect the functioning within the prison.
- b) To examine if prison violence can be predicted from records of offending

### METHOD

All the records of incidents inside the prison setting were classified and the incidents were hierarchically organised beginning from the most frequent and ending with the least. Chi square analysis was used to compare for significance of

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difference between the violent and non- violent incidents.

The most recent offences of the individual responsible for the most frequent offences were tabulated and examined.

A chi square analysis was used to compare for significance of the difference between offence profiles

Only those incidents, which were considered resolved i.e. considered as ‘closed files’ were examined.

The study excludes all unresolved incidents.

The study considers all such records for 12 retrospective months.

RESULTS

The first step comprised tabulating incidents inside the prison (Table 1).

Table I  
*Incidents Inside the Prison*

Category	Number	Percentages
Assault	20	58.8
Property Damage	6	17.6
Victims of Assault	3	8.8
Illness	1	2.9
Other	4	11.7
TOTAL	34	100

The category ‘victim of assault’ was included for those cases where the assailants were individual(s) unknown as unnamed by the victim.

Since both assault and property damage can be described as violent incidents, a comparison between these and the non-violent incidents reveals

that there are significantly more violent than non violent incidences within the prison (p<.01).

Secondly, an attempt was made to study the most frequent offences of the individuals involved in the incidents (Table 2).

Table 2  
*The Most Recent Conviction of the Individuals Involved in the Incidents*

Category	Percentages
Assault	25
Driving Related	13.4
Parole Related	11.53
Other Offences Against Person	9.6
Offences against Property	9.6
Rape	5.76
Larceny	5.76
Drug Related	5.76
Robbery	5.76
False Pretences	3.84
Remanded	3.84
	100

The table shows that the three most frequent recent convictions were for assault, driving related offences and parole related offences.

To further study if there is any link between he nature of incident and the type of conviction, the records were divided into those who were involved

in assault and those involved in property damage and examined separately (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3  
*The Most Recent Conviction of Individuals Involved in Assault*

Category	Percentages
Assault	39.4
Offence against Person	18.4
Parole Related	13.1
Driving Related	13.1
Robbery	7.8
Property Offences	7.8
Larceny	5.2
Drug Related	2.6
Rape	2.6
Remand	2.6

Table 4  
*The Most Recent Conviction of Individuals Involved in Property Damage*

CATEGORY	PERCENTAGES
Parole Related	30.7
Property Offences	23
Drug Related	15.3
Driving Related	7.6
Rape	7.6
Assault	7.6
False pretences	7.6
Offence Against Person	0
Robbery	0
Remand	0

The results show that violent incidents are significantly more frequent in a high security prison than non-violent ones ( $p < .01$ ).

The results also show that the most frequent offence of individuals involved in assaults inside the prison is assaults followed by offences against person.

The two together account for 40.8% of the most frequent recent convictions. The difference between the frequency of assault as the index offence between the individuals involved in assaults inside the prison and those involved in property damage inside the prison is highly significant ( $p < .001$ ).

On the other hand, those individuals who are involved in property damage inside the prison are most frequently recently convicted parole related offences followed by property damage. The difference between this figure and that for

individuals involved in assaults inside the prison is also highly significant ( $p < .01$ ).

More individuals who are convicted of drug offences are involved in property damage than assaults ( $p < .01$ ) and more individuals who are involved in assaults are convicted of driving related offences (ns).

Individuals who are convicted for parole related offences are more likely to be involved in property damage than assault. The difference however is not significant.

#### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the degree to which violent incidents were causing disruption inside a high security prison and to see if the nature of violent incidents could be predicted from the profile of offending.

To this end, the study collected data from all the 'closed files' within a high security institution for twelve retrospective months.

An analysis of incidents showed that violent incidents are more frequent than non-violent ones and that the most frequent incident was assault followed by property damage. Violence within the institutions therefore causes significant disruption in functioning.

An analysis of the offence profile of the individuals involved in the two categories of incidents shows that those involved in assaults are most likely to have been convicted of assaults and other offences against a person (index offence). Those who are involved in property damage on the other hand, are most likely to have been convicted of parole related offences and property damage.

Another interesting finding is that those who are convicted of drug related offences are more likely to be involved in property damage while those who are involved in assaults are more likely to be convicted of driving related offences.

It appears from the first set of observations therefore that incidents inside the prison could be no more than a reflection of offending behaviours per se. This has got important therapeutic implications. It may mean that therapeutic intervention immediately following an incident, which will help the offender examine the antecedents of violent behaviour, may significantly affect re-offending. It would then also imply that the prisoner would benefit from psychological intervention, as soon as is practical, following an incident.

The second set of findings regarding the relationship between drug related offending and property damage as well as between driving related offending and assault seem to reflect some underlying cognitive structures.

A good deal of anecdotal and research evidence shows that those individuals having a drug problem resort to larceny/theft and robbery. Does the fact that such individuals are more frequently involved in property damage inside the institution reflect a disregard for the concept of possession of property (or trespassing against the same)?

Similarly, does the fact that those involved in driving related offences are more frequently involved in assaults reflect a disregard for personal safety of others?

It may be worthwhile to conduct an attitudinal survey in this regard.

In the therapeutic context then it might be beneficial to actively elicit and discuss these cognitions.

To sum up therefore, it appears that incidents inside the prison are a reflection of the offending behaviour and the nature of offending could reflect certain relatively stable underlying cognitive structures.

The central limitation of the study is the relatively small sample size and a short time frame. However, as an explorative study, it does throw up certain important questions which are well worth further investigation.

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