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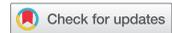
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Addressing the Victim–Offender Overlap: Advancing Evidence-Based Research to Better Service Criminally Involved People with Victimization Histories

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ABSTRACT

We studied a representative sample of male and female inmates (N = 266) in two prisons (remand and sentenced) in Western Canada. Our research asks: what are the self-reported victimization histories of currently incarcerated men and women prior to first charge (i.e., before becoming known offenders) and during their life-course? As a second objective, we discuss how we sought to mobilize our findings to change relevant policy and police practice. We found that the overwhelming majority of our female participants had experienced violent, sexual, or property victimization throughout their life course; the majority had experienced victimization prior to first charge. Based on our findings, the local police service introduced victim services for the incarcerated population as well as made changes to their recruit training program to make new police officers aware of the victim–offender overlap and its effects. If replicated, the introduction of victim services for inmates in other jurisdictions and the education of police officers on the victim–offender overlap would emphasize the humanitarian recognition of supporting victims who need help, while also having a series of subsidiary benefits with respect to re-offending, resiliency, and police legitimacy.

KEYWORDS

Victim offender overlap; police training; police legitimacy; victimization; prisons

In the 1980s, an Anglican priest sexually assaulted at least 13 boys in his care at a youth facility in the Canadian prairies. More than twenty years later the police investigated these highly traumatic crimes. After one of the victims – now an adult – recounted his history of abuse to police forensic detectives, he returned home and killed himself.

At least nine of the other 13 victims contacted for forensic witness interviews about their childhood victimization had grown to become career criminals. Five were being held in a Western Canadian remand prison during the accused's trial. When the police served these men with their subpoenas for testimonies in court, Victim Services refused to assist them in preparing for their upcoming forensic witness interviews or testimonies in court. Because they were incarcerated at the time of their court hearing Victim Services did not support them, despite the fact that these men were compelled under subpoena to recount their extensive childhood sexual victimization histories in court.

Victim Services is mandated to provide victims of crime with resources to help them navigate their financial losses, connect them with other agencies – such as sexual assault

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centers – and prepare and provide support for their court interviews and trials. They also assist people in applying for financial benefits through Canada’s crime compensation fund. In Canada, Victim Services Sections are embedded in local police services and offer trauma support, access to financial assistance, and help victims of crime navigate the justice system. This work is mandated nationally through the Canadian Government’s *Victims Bill of Rights*. While embedded in police services, they are funded through the Justice and Solicitor General offices in each province. It is at the discretion of individual policing agencies as to the particularities of how they provide Victim Services to the victim population. Conspicuously, police agencies, in collaboration with the authorities in Canada’s provincial prisons,¹ have resisted making Victim Services available to prisoners.² When attending a training program relating to Victim Services in 2016, a representative of the Provincial³ Solicitor General made it clear that: “We will never enter a correctional facility to work with offenders on their victimization.” As he concluded, “That is not our role.” Such a stance relies upon an implicit valuation of who should count as a suitable victim, and is in stark contrast to the wording of the *Canadian Victims Bill of Rights* which simply states that “Every victim has the right, on request, to information about:

- (a) the criminal justice system and the role of victims in it;
- (b) the services and programs available to them as a victim, including restorative justice programs; and
- (c) their right to file a complaint for an infringement or denial of any of their rights under this Act.” (Canadian Victim Bill of Rights, 2015)

In refusing to provide such services to inmates, police and correctional officials had tended to perceive of inmates *only* as criminals, and to not contemplate or accept that these individuals might *also* be victims. One barrier to challenging that perception and altering the existing policy was a lack of evidence which could document the victimization profile of incarcerated individuals in Western Canada, especially their victimization history during childhood and prior to being charged with a crime.

As researchers, the situation involving the Anglican priest’s sexual assault victims mentioned above inspired us to collect systematic data in an effort to learn about the profile of the victim–offender overlap in Western Canada. While the majority of victims of sexual assault will never themselves become offenders (Easton, 2012), the fact that several of these men were both victims and offenders is not entirely surprising. The victim-offender overlap, i.e., the situation in which an offender has also experienced victimization (during or post offense) or, alternatively when a victim also engages in crime (Reingle, 2014), is well-established in the scholarly literature. Existing criminological studies on this phenomenon tend to focus on individuals who are currently (or have recently been) involved in criminal activity, and rarely go back further into an offender’s biography or childhood to document any victimization history that existed prior to their being involved in crime.

At the same time, there is an established literature on the link between childhood victimization and future offending which generally shows that the great majority of children who have experienced childhood abuse can break the cycle of violence, i.e., they do not become offenders themselves (McGloin & Widom, 2001). Some of these studies focus on resiliency factors, i.e., factors that may protect childhood victims from themselves becoming offenders (Turanovic & Pratt, 2015; Wright et al., 2019). Studies of childhood victimization

and future offending often derive their victimization rates from administrative data provided by social service agencies, which tend to miss out on the large number of childhood victims who have never been referred to an agency (Wright et al., 2019).

In interviewing 266 currently incarcerated individuals about their victimization histories, including their childhood victimization, our study addresses some of these gaps in the literature. We ask the following research question: What are the self-reported victimization histories of currently incarcerated men and women *prior* to first charge (i.e., *before* becoming known offenders) and during their life-course? As a second objective, we discuss how we sought to mobilize our findings to change relevant policy and police practice.

The victim-offender overlap

R. J. Sampson and Lauritsen (1990) early work on deviant lifestyles identifies consistent and strong correlations between offending (particularly violence, vandalism, and theft) and personal victimization. Subsequent studies also point to a reciprocal relationship between offending and victimization, with the effect of offending on victimization being larger than the obverse (Lauritsen et al., 1991, p. 286). Other research has examined the links between exposure to violence, posttraumatic stress, and delinquency; experiences which are related to a heightened victim-offender overlap and higher rates of incarceration (Wood et al., 2002). Research in this tradition also documents high rates of mental health issues, including the fact that 60% of incarcerated youth in Lauritsen et al. sample had diagnosable mental disorders and 50% had substance abuse issues.

Such research supports the findings of scholars who have examined the consequences of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs); behaviors that can include criminal victimization, but also involves neglect, family dysfunction, witnessing domestic violence, and growing up with family members who have substance abuse disorders. Individuals who have ACEs have a higher likelihood of drug use and addiction (Dube et al., 2003) as well as disease and psychiatric disorders, and of engaging in high-risk sexual behavior (Felitti & Anda, 2010). Further, those who experience four or more ACEs are at greater risk of heart disease, cancer, alcohol abuse, drug addiction, and are more likely to become involved in crime and be incarcerated later in life (Danese & McEwen, 2012; Felitti & Anda, 2010; Felitti et al., 1998; Schilling et al., 2008). Similarly, Weeks and Widom (1998) studied the link between child victimization and offending, finding that 58% of offenders in their sample had experienced childhood physical abuse. Generally speaking, the studies on childhood victimization and future offending still often neglect to contemplate important distinctions such as the type of violence children have experienced, the frequency in which they experienced such violence, and the comorbidity of the abuse experiences (Malvaso et al., 2018). However, frequency, comorbidity, and type of violence all have an influence on the likelihood of future offending and behavior (Currie & Tekin, 2011; Heller et al., 1999; Jaffee et al., 2007; McGloin & Widom, 2001)

Criminological research on the victim-offender overlap has also examined the link between childhood victimization and future offending, providing evidence for two main findings; that a) victims of childhood abuse are generally at an increased risk to become perpetrators of violence in adolescence and young adulthood (see, for examples, Currie & Tekin, 2011; Watts & McNulty, 2013) but b) not all victims of child abuse (sexual and physical) will perpetrate violence in their future (see, for example, Jaffee et al., 2007).

One of the methodological challenges in interpreting the existing criminological research on the link between childhood abuse and future violence derives from the fact that it often uses agency-based samples of abused children. Topitzes et al. (2013), however, have shown that agency-based data sets under-report the frequency of childhood abuse. As these samples are only comprised of children who are referred to agencies they may consequently miss a considerable number of cases of childhood abuse. It is also likely that those children referred to agencies may already have more familial or extrafamilial support systems (Heller et al., 1999), meaning that some severe cases of childhood abuse may be entirely missed in these data sets.

Few studies of the victim–offender overlap are conducted with incarcerated populations. Cooley (1993) is an exception, in that he documented the victimization experiences of 117 incarcerated male prisoners, although his focus was limited to victimization that occurred while incarcerated (see Zweig et al. (2015) for a similar focus in the US context). Cooley's research is similar to most prison-based studies, in that it also relied on institutional records to identify victimization histories (see Dutton & Hart, 1992; Hosser et al., 2007; Widom, 1989).

While many works confirm that incarcerated populations have also often been victims themselves, their reliance on official records raises the familiar concern about underreporting (e.g., Neyroud, 2016; R.J. Sampson & Laub, 1997). What we have, then, is a growing recognition that offenders have also often themselves been victimized, and that victimization experiences are correlated with criminal behavior. However, few studies have been conducted on the victimization histories of incarcerated offenders, especially with respect to self-reported victimization, including childhood victimization.

Methods and settings

This article is based on interviews and surveys of 38 incarcerated women and 228 incarcerated men in both a remand and sentenced facility in Western Canada.⁴ We received Ministry and research ethics approval for our study in 2016 and conducted the surveys used for this article in two 4-week periods in 2017. The research took place in a remand institution that housed 700 prisoners in total (about 80 of whom were women) and in a sentenced institution that housed about 300 men and no women. Remand facilities detain all adults awaiting trial, including those arrested for impaired driving all the way to those accused of multiple murders or terrorism-related activities. Sentenced institutions operated by the Canadian provincial governments house individuals sentenced to a period of incarceration of up to 2 years in length.

We typically entered the prisons as a group of eight researchers (two principal investigators and six research assistants) and made public announcements on the living units, explaining that we were conducting research on life experiences in provincial prisons, and asked for volunteers who might be interested in participating. Typically, one researcher conducted the interviews on one living unit, allowing us to disperse the team throughout the prison to reach a broad cross-section of inmates.

We conducted one-on-one interviews and concluded those discussions with a survey on victimization. The survey contained 57 questions and focused on background information about the participants' personal history, demographic factors, and involvement in crime, and the criminal justice system. Asking our sample to self-report was designed to address some of the problems with the typical reliance on agency data.

For the purpose of this article, we focus on eight survey items to explore victimization histories. This includes questions about the occurrence and frequency of their own property, violent, and sexual victimization experiences prior to and after their first arrest. We documented age at the time of victimization, the location where the victimizations occurred (such as “home” or “school”) as well as the type of offender (such as “parent,” “religious figure,” “family friend,” etc.). We also asked if the prisoner reported their victimization to the police and whether they were offered or received assistance from Victim Services.

Variables

To measure victimization histories, we consider three types of victimization independently: violent, property, and sexual. Each victimization type is a dichotomous nominal variable indicating whether they have been a victim, coded “1,” or ‘0’ if they have not. We also considered four other survey items to examine victimization prior to first charge: “Age of first violent victimization,” “Age of first property victimization,” and “Age of first sexual victimization.” These interval variables were compared against the “Age of first criminal charge” variable and were recoded into new dichotomous nominal (coded 1 = yes, 0 = no) variables: “Violent victimization prior to first charge,” “Property victimization prior to first charge,” and “Sexual victimization prior to first charge” respectively. To explore variance within responses we considered the independent variable of gender coded “1” as female and “2” as male. Cases with responses of “Don’t know” or “Not stated” to any of these variables were excluded from all analyses.

In a bid to provide nuance to our findings we applied a mixed method approach to our analysis. Combining narratives and qualitative coding with quantified survey data permitted a deeper understanding of the overall experiences of our participants (Small, 2011). For the survey portion of our interviews, we used SPSS for data management and statistical analysis. We used basic tabular data to derive summary descriptive statistics, frequencies, and detect potential skewness and kurtosis in responses to identify outliers. For the qualitative portion of our research, we transcribed the semi-structured interviews and created a formal coding scheme. To accomplish this, five researchers coded a set of six randomly chosen interviews across three intervals to adjust and amend the coding scheme until intercoder reliability was reached (85% to 90% coding overlap). Interviews were thematically coded using the qualitative software tool Nvivo 11. Interviews with prisoners varied in length, but averaged approximately 90 min.

The police agency that provided the data on the implementation of Victim Services Support in prison has 2,300 staff and serves a community of just under one million people. That agency also worked in cooperation with one of the authors (who is also a senior leader in the organization) to affect policy changes relating to Victim Services and the training curriculum for new police recruits that we outline in the discussion section.

Limitations

As our research relies on participants’ self-reported histories of victimization, questions arise as to whether these accounts may alternatively demonstrate under or overcounts of their victimization histories. To date, most studies on self-reported victimization stress that victimization experiences typically go underreported. Canada’s General Social Survey

suggests that on average only one-third of criminal victimizations are reported to the police. These rates vary significantly according to the type of crime, with, for example, about 9 in 10 (88%) of sexual assaults by a non-spousal perpetrator going unreported (Sinha, 2015). Men typically report victimization experiences less often than women, something that is especially true for men who have been sexually victimized. Coxell et al. (1999), for example, conducted a study of 2,474 men and found only two of the forty men who indicated having had non-consensual sex with other men had reported their victimization to the police. Some of the factors the authors identify as barriers to reporting include their participants' beliefs that their victimization experiences will not be taken seriously, and a fear of facing a homophobic response. Recent studies report male victimization is still under-researched and not well-understood, and that male victims of sexual assault continue to cite the same barriers to reporting as 20 years earlier, most prominently the fear of being seen as "gay" (Delle Donne et al., 2018).

There are several reasons why we also believe that any skew or bias in our data should be interpreted as an underreport of the true level of victimization in these prisoners' lives. First, our initial research solicitation did not identify victimization histories as one of the main topics of discussion. Instead, this was introduced as a possible theme during a one-on-one formal consent process prior to the interview. Consequently, our sample was not specifically selected, nor did it self-select, for histories of victimization. Second, participants knew they would derive no organizational benefits from recounting their victimization. Third, as we did not ask about participants' criminal records or behaviors (although many participants volunteered this information) we relieved individuals from feeling that they had to point to their victimization histories to excuse or justify their criminal activities. Finally, the dynamics of masculinity (particularly in prison) undoubtedly made it especially difficult for some men to admit to having been victimized, particularly sexually victimized. Depending on the interviewer and the type of victimization being described, it was sometimes apparent that some participants were not comfortable sharing the full extent of their experiences. Indeed, several participants displayed unambiguous interpersonal signs that they had experienced forms of victimization that they were not comfortable discussing or recording on the survey, including shaking their heads or making hand gestures suggesting the interviewer should move to the next set of questions. With more time or opportunities to conduct follow up interviews, we expect the number of incidents participants detailed would have increased. That said, when comparing the victimization levels among men across prisons, our data show similar victimization rates across different institutions.

Findings

We interviewed 266 incarcerated individuals about their victimization experiences, 228 male participants, and 38 female participants. Almost all participants responded to our questions relating to their victimization history (see "total" column in Table 1). Ninety-six percent of our male participants identified as having been victimized in some way (violent, property, sexual) during the course of their lives. Many indicated multiple victimizations. These victimization levels among the men were consistent within 2–4% across the two prisons. Our female participants reported an almost identical rate of 97%. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between victimization and gender. Although gender variance for property and violent victimization was not present,

Table 1. Victimization statistics.

	Victimization		Total (n)		Mean age at first criminal victimization	Age range (n)
	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)		
Men						
Violent victimization	199	88%	225	88%	14	1–48
Property victimization	182	81%	225	81%	16	1–50
Sexual victimization	77	34%	223	34%	7.4	1–16
Women						
Violent victimization	32	84%	38	84%	17	1–39
Property victimization	31	82%	38	82%	16	4–33
Sexual victimization	27	75%	36	75%	9.86	2–16

sexual victimization was significant ($X^2(1) = 21.13, p < .001$). In our sample women were more likely than men to be sexually victimized (Table 1).

The results demonstrate that our participants have been both commonly and frequently victimized; victimization was a common part of their lives, often beginning at young and vulnerable ages. Eighty-eight percent of our male participants and 84% of our female participants identified having experienced violent victimization (e.g., hitting, getting beaten up, had weapons used against them, etc.) at some point in their lives. The mean age of the first violent victimization that male participants could recall was 14 years old and ranged from 1 to 48 years old (Table 1). For women, first violent victimization occurred, on average, at 17 years of age, and occurred from 1 to 39 years old.⁵

Eighty-one percent of our male sample and 82% of our female sample experienced victimization in the form of property crimes (e.g., vandalism or having money or property stolen including vehicles, clothing, jewelry, and tools). The mean age of the first property offense committed against our participants was 16 years old, ranging from 1 to 50 years old for male participants, while the mean age for women was 16 years old and ranged from 4 to 33 years old (Table 1).

Lastly, 34% of our male participants experienced some form of sexual victimization (e.g., unwanted touching and sexual assault) during their lives. The mean age of sexual victimization for men was 7.4 years old and ranged from 1 to 16 years old in age (Table 1). While 34% of our male sample had been sexually victimized, 75% of our female sample experienced sexual victimization, with the first victimization occurring at an average age of 9.9 years old and ranging from 2 to 16 years old.

These findings are striking when compared to the latest edition of Statistics Canada's 2014 General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety and Victimization. The GSS data ($N = 33,089$) reported that 32.8% of Canadian men and 22.9% of Canadian women experienced violent victimization before the age of 15. In terms of sexual victimization, 4.6% of Canadian men and 13.2% of Canadian women have been sexually victimized prior to the age of 15 (Statistics Canada, 2016). A limitation of the Canadian GSS survey, which only reinforces the significance of our research, is that people who are residing in institutions such as prisons are not included in the sample population. Consequently, the rates of victimization found in the GSS survey are not an accurate representation of the Canadian population, nor generalizable/applicable to the experiences of those who are incarcerated.

There were, however, moderate univariate outliers of sexual victimization collected in the survey. For the "age of first sexual victimization" variable there were six outliers (ages 19, 29, 27, 27, 31, and 33) for our male participants and four outliers (ages 18, 31, 31, and 32) for our female participants. These cases were omitted from our descriptive statistics to prevent

skewness of “mean age at first sexual victimization.” If these cases were to be included the mean age at first sexual victimization would be 9 for our male participants and 14.7 for our female participants. These findings highlight that most incidents of sexual victimization for both male and female participants occurred during young and vulnerable periods of their lives.

The scholarly literature on the victim-offender overlap has tended to concentrate on the co-occurrence of criminal involvement and victimization (co-occurrence refers to individuals being victimized while committing a crime, such as being assaulted and robbed during a drug deal) (Averdijk et al., 2016; Bottoms & Costello, 2011; Lauritsen et al., 1992). However, in our sample, we found that around two-thirds of our participants had experienced victimization prior to their first charge (see Table 2). Our male participants were first charged when they were, on average, 17.9 years old, while for women the average age was 19.3. Among our respondents who had been a victim of violence, 69% (128/186) of men and 65% (20/31) of women reported experiencing violent victimization prior to their first charge; 61% (104/172) of our male and 70% (21/30) of our female participants had experienced a property crime, and most starkly, 89% (67/75) of our male participants and 72% (18/25) of our female respondents experienced sexual victimization before their first criminal charge (Table 2). Consequently, most had been victimized before they formally encountered the criminal justice system as an accused individual.

While our findings indicate that 82% of our male and 83% of our female participants were victims prior to first arrest, they cannot speak to whether these individuals were involved in some level of criminality before coming to the attention of law enforcement. However, given the high proportion of individuals in our sample who had been sexually victimized, and the low average age at which such victimization occurred, it is unlikely that the large number of our participants who have experienced sexual victimization had already been involved in criminal activities.

The great majority of our sample, both men and women never reported their victimization to the police or family/child welfare and social workers. In the qualitative portion of the interview, we asked participants why that was the case, and answers ranged from “never really thinking about reporting,” to “not wanting to be a snitch,” “not knowing how to,” to “no one would have believed me,” to “feeling ashamed about being victimized,” to “not growing up in an environment where you would report to police because you take matters in your own hands/low trust in police.” Sometimes, however, they indicated that their victimization was reported on their behalf by family or neighbors, or when treated at the hospital for sexual or physical assault. Only 18% of our male participants had ever accessed Victim Services, in comparison to the 38% of our female participants who had done so,

Table 2. Victimization statistics: prior to first charge.

	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Men		
Violent victimization	128/186	69
Property victimization	104/172	61
Sexual victimization	67/75	89
Women		
Violent victimization	20/31	65
Property victimization	21/30	70
Sexual victimization	18/25	72

although the majority of women indicated that their experiences with Victim Services involved one-time perfunctory meetings. When asking why they did not use Victim Services, the answers ranged from “not knowing of its existence,” to “not knowing that they might be eligible,” to “not being worthy of their services,” to “being sure that no one would believe me.” Several saw contacting Victim Services as akin to officially reporting their victimization to the police, and indicated that they would not report because they “are not a rat.”

Discussion and policy outcomes: implementing victim services and modifying police training

Our research findings clearly show that the great majority of incarcerated men and women are victimized long before ever being charged with a crime. Interestingly, a slightly lower percentage of women indicates to be physically victimized before first charge than men. During the survey portion of our interviews, women often normalized physical and sexual violence against them to a greater degree than men. The violent victimization documented in the survey was often extreme, such as being beaten to the extent that they needed to be hospitalized or had to seek medical attention. This may explain why we see a slightly lower percentage of women being victimized than men.

Overall, our findings show that almost everyone incarcerated in Western Canada, both men and women, were victims before becoming offenders. Our findings further show that official data sources such as the GSS are clearly not representative for the incarcerated population and that the victimization rates for incarcerated populations are much higher than in the general population (based on the GSS).

Our findings provided our team with evidence of the victim-offender overlap as manifest amongst men and women in prison. The police officer coauthor of this article was consequently able to bring these findings to the attention of his municipal police department and to representatives of the provincial Justice and Solicitor General. The aim was to challenge the tendency among police and other criminal justice actors to stigmatize inmates as *just* inmates, and instead draw attention to how inmates can also have their own traumatic histories of victimization that warrant the support of Victim Services. That policing officials are not generally aware of the prevalence of a victim-offender overlap is unsurprising, as research has shown that knowledge about trauma and victimization are major gaps in the foundations of police training (Lathan et al., 2019). The municipal police department that ultimately used our findings to change practices was not different in that regard.

Our findings demonstrate the illogic of a Victims Services policy against assisting incarcerated men and women. Indeed, as the mandate of Victim Services is to help all victims – without engaging in a questionable assessment of who should count as a “suitable” victim – then it is vital to recognize that perhaps more than in any other institution our prisons are full of individuals who have themselves been victimized and who stand to benefit from such assistance. Persuaded by the unambiguous evidence of a considerable victim-offender overlap amongst inmates, the Provincial Ministry consequently negotiated an agreement with the author to implement Victim Services in both the local remand and sentenced facilities. In other words: these data were crucial in marshaling support for an evidence-based policy change such that Victim Services are now offered to a subset of provincially incarcerated individuals in both the local remand and sentenced facility. As

noted, this prospect was initially met with substantial resistance from both police service and the solicitor general's office until we were able to present our research findings demonstrating the scope of the problem.

Victim services were introduced initially as a pilot project in the local remand facility. In Phase 1, which ran from June 28, 2018 to October 23, 2018, a Victim Service worker gave brief group presentations outlining the services on offer to 365 male and female prisoners housed on different units. Subsequently, the Victim Service worker also presented the information to 40 individuals who were unable to attend the group presentations. She also made presentations about Victim Services to three separate shifts of correctional officers, introducing the initiative to approximately 300 staff (including a new correctional officer training class consisting of 10 people). This included providing information on the mandate of Victim Services, how they can help, and how to refer incarcerated individuals to the Victim Service worker.

Soon after the presentations, the Victim Services worker received 64 requests from prisoners, which resulted in one-on-one appointments to discuss their victimization experiences. All meetings with individuals inquiring about the prospect of using Victim Services take several hours and often involve repeated contact. The inmates receive information on how to navigate various services to address financial losses, psychological counseling, and possible court hearings. She also received 10 email/in-person inquiries from correctional staff who were assaulted at work and wanted to learn about the possibility of using the service for themselves.

Over 50% of the requests for one-on-one meeting with the Victim Service worker involved prisoners inquiring about financial assistance and benefits. While financial assistance and financially compensating victims of crime fall under the jurisdiction of Victim Services, the Victim Service worker, in consultation with Jones, decided that at this stage the emphasis would instead be on identifying those individuals with lengthy victimization histories and who likely had trauma-related needs. Consequently, in phase 2, the victim service worker stopped replying to each request she received and instead prioritized requests for appointments that came from those who had histories of repeat victimization, complex needs, who faced multi-level barriers (such as mental health, substance abuse, lack of housing, lack of familial supports) had experienced high levels of trauma, and required in-depth support and assistance. In essence, the focus was on assisting those who had higher and more complex needs.

Between the end of October 2018 and mid-February 2019, the rate of requests to the Victim Services worker from within the prisons slowed. Therefore, the police service expanded the Victim Service worker's mandate to also identify individuals who had a victim/offender history and who had recently been incarcerated but had already been released into the community but who might still require services. To accomplish this slight expansion of her mandate, the Victim Services worker reached out to the Solicitor General Community Corrections Director and made presentations to all five adult probation offices in the jurisdiction from May 2019 to June 2019. As a consequence, she received 11 requests from probation officers to meet with individuals in the community who fall in the victim-offender overlap category. Again, these individuals had never previously been reached by Victim Services. Between February 2019 and June 2019, the Victim Services worker also received eight requests to meet with individuals requiring Victim Services from non-government community correction providers, the police agency's Investigations Unit,

Provincial Health Services, and the correctional staff within the remand and sentenced facilities.

This police agency has now committed one staff person to work with individuals in prison or who have been recently released who fall within the victim–offender overlap category. The Victim Services worker has also been able to connect the incarcerated men and women with services they can access while detained as well as those available to them upon release. Some of these services include counseling provided by the local sexual assault centers, and a range of programming offered by agencies that assist with intimate partner violence, as well as organizations focused on housing, addictions, and other social services.

Another consistent finding of our research is that the majority of our participants never reported their victimization. One of the common reasons why they did not report was a belief that no one would have taken them seriously and/or that they grew up in an environment where non-reporting was common and trust in the police was low. These reasons speak to the fact that our participants simply do not believe that officials in the criminal justice system would believe their victimization histories, or they generally have low trust in the police’s ability to help their situation. In light of this situation, we also used our findings on non-reporting to convince the local police organization responsible for operating Victim Services to use the data from our study to educate members of their organization about the extent of the victim–offender overlap in Western Canada. This currently takes two forms. First, the data are being used to design a video series that outlines our quantitative findings to provide police officers with a sense of the scope of this phenomenon. This is followed by a module that incorporates personal testimonials from victim/offenders discussing their childhood and lingering trauma as well as their interactions with the police over their life course. This educational platform has been designed to provide a holistic (both qualitative and quantitative) understanding of the victim–offender overlap to ensure that skeptical or ill-informed officers do not dismiss victimization as rare or “one-off” instances.

The second component of this educational effort involves introducing this topic into police recruit training. This will consist of lectures based on our findings designed to provide recruits with an empirical understanding of the victim–offender overlap. Individuals with lived experiences will be featured in video materials, but also invited to make in-person presentations such that recruits have an opportunity to interact with and ask questions of these men and women. To garner buy-in from newly recruited officers – many of whom are not predisposed to thinking of offenders also as victims – these sessions will be prefaced by outlining how such programs can result in heightened police legitimacy, and how there tends to be less offending and less re-offending in communities where the police are seen as legitimate (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler et al., 2014).

The educational goal of these initiatives is to provide police officers and recruits with a more comprehensive and sympathetic understanding of the people with whom they are often working, including a sensitivity to the factors that can influence pathways to incarceration, and the personal effects of ACEs and ongoing trauma. The ultimate goal is to increase compassion and awareness among police officers and new recruits to hopefully improve interactions with citizens and to advance the aims of community policing (Reed, 2016). This, in turn, might have important consequences for community–police relationships. If police generally treat people with more respect, the likelihood that the public,

including victims, will cooperate with police increases, as does the prospect that they will more readily report their own victimization experiences (Tyler et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Our findings provide a grim picture about the prevalence of victimization among incarcerated men and women in Western Canada. While the established consensus on studies of childhood victimization and future offending is that the majority of childhood victims will not become offenders, we have been able to shed light on the fact that incarcerated offenders are almost always victims before they commit crimes themselves. The criminal justice system ideally provides justice for victims while working toward preventing further victimization. When seen in that light, being aware of the pronounced overlap between individuals who are both offenders and victims – yet failing to address these people's victim-related needs simply because they happen to be incarcerated – is a system failure.

The situation we have described represents the first instance of a Victim Service program being implemented into provincial prisons in Canada,⁶ one that has quickly expanded to also serve individuals on parole. The acknowledgment by the police, its Victim Service unit, and correctional officials, that incarcerated men and women can simultaneously be victims and offenders is a step toward addressing the many underlying issues that such individuals often face pertaining to a range of traumatic experiences they have experienced over the course of their lifetime (Lauritsen & Laub, 2007). It is an effort to take seriously the full scope of the victim-offender overlap, and allows the criminal justice system to demonstrate a level of compassion by serving the needs of a group of victims that have traditionally not been perceived as victims.

The benefit of such programming lies first and foremost in a humanitarian recognition of the intrinsic value in supporting victims who need help. However, this programming – and the research findings which were marshaled to justify the introduction of such services – may also have a series of subsidiary benefits. For example, the failure to address inmates' victimization may also exacerbate the prospect that such individuals will engage in future criminality (and be re-incarcerated) given that unaddressed adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are linked to future criminal behavior (Drury et al., 2017; Fox et al., 2015; Hill & Nathan, 2008). A systematic approach to addressing ACEs involving justice, health, education, and social service agencies can have a positive effect and build resilience in people and the community (Ellis & Dietz, 2017). The introduction of Victim Service into the provincial jails can play a role in building this individual and community resilience.

Having police officials deliver a service that recognizes and attempts to address the preexisting victimization of the offending population may also help improve police legitimacy amongst criminally involved groups and the wider society. Research on police legitimacy demonstrates that when community members view police as legitimately holding power, offending and reoffending decreases while compliance with the law increases (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012; Tankebe, 2013). This, in turn, can make people more willing to report crime and victimization, something that seem particularly pertinent in our setting given that our findings demonstrate that the great majority of participants never reported their own victimization experiences (see also, Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). In our particular research context, where the police organization is *also* responsible for offering victim

services, it is possible that implementing such programming could have particularly positive effects on improving police legitimacy.

Offering Victim Services to those who have been victimized, independent of where they currently reside, is a drastic change in policing and correctional practice. Other jurisdictions interested in exploring this policy reform can draw upon our documentation of the massive victim-offender overlap amongst incarcerated individuals, as those data speak to the substantial need for Victim Services amongst all victims, irrespective of where they are temporarily housed. Equally importantly, the compassion training that has been developed for newly recruited police officers will provide officers with a more nuanced understanding of the complex life circumstances of many of their clients. This in turn might have positive effects on how they will treat people in their encounters with citizens, hopefully leading to trickle-down effects on victim's willingness to report their victimization. One of the obvious next steps is to now evaluate the success of these initiatives. This would include attending to how these policy changes might change outcomes for prisoners, both in terms of their mental health and well-being and also their long-term involvement in or desistance from crime, as well as any influence they might have on how police officers do their jobs.

Notes

1. In Canada, provincial prisons hold all remand prisoners awaiting trial as well as those sentenced to less than two years. Federal prisons hold prisoners sentenced to more than two years.
2. We use the terms “inmates,” “offenders,” and “prisoners” interchangeably. When we asked participants in the wider University of Alberta Prison Project, they either showed no preference or preferred the term inmate over prisoner.
3. Based on our research agreement, we cannot name the Western Canadian province where we conducted our research.
4. The surveys were conducted as part of the University of Alberta Prison Project (UAPP, <https://www.canadiancriminology.com/>) which has amassed a much larger data set comprised of 587 semi-structured interviews on life experiences in Canadian prisons across four prisons in a Western Canadian province. The larger data set also consists of qualitative interviews with 131 correctional staff across those four institutions. Independent research inside of Canadian prisons is almost non-existent due to the closed and risk-averse nature of correctional ministries. Thus, our study comprises the largest independent mixed-methods study on Canadian prisons in the history of Canadian criminology.
5. The survey also included a question to indicate who had committed these acts against them. Several participants noted that family members, social workers, or other individuals had informed them about the abuse they had experienced when they were infants.
6. To the best of our knowledge.

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