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GRAFFITI OFFENDERS' PATTERNS OF DESISTANCE FROM, AND PERSISTENCE IN, CRIME: NEW INSIGHTS INTO REDUCING RECIDIVIST OFFENDING

While graffiti is a gateway crime towards more serious criminal offending, little is known about graffitiists' patterns of desistance from, and persistence in, crime. This paper addresses this knowledge shortfall through an examination of the Western Australian Police Information Management System (IMS) database for three age-groups (i.e. *preteens, adolescents, adults*) and three categories of graffiti offenders (*Early Desisters, Limited Persisters, Chronic Persisters*). Descriptive and chi-squared statistics reveal that: i) nearly three-quarters of all of the 667 preteen, adolescent and adult graffiti offenders desisted from further offending after their first or second contact with police; ii) the mainly adolescent cohort of Limited Persister offenders account for the majority of all recorded violent crime; and c) most graffiti offenders are processed through the court system for both their graffiti and non-graffiti-related offences. The implications for designing recidivist intervention programmes that target offenders at the different stages of their offending are discussed.

Keywords: graffiti; crime; police; resilience building; Early Desisters, Limited Persisters, Chronic Persisters; preteen, adolescent, adult offenders

While few juveniles aged <18 years progress through childhood, into adolescence, and on to adulthood without some minor dalliance in crime, it is estimated that only a very small (but increasing) percentage of juveniles (5–10%) actually constitute the cohort of seasoned offenders who collectively account for 55% of all recorded juvenile crime (Henry *et al.*, 1996; Cottle *et al.*, 2001; Loeber *et al.*, 2001; Muncie, 2004; Roe & Ashe, 2008). Despite recognising that some juvenile offenders are

more prolific than others, it is surprising how little research effort to date has been directed towards understanding why many juveniles desist from further offending after just one or two dalliances in crime while others persist with their offending. Although it is impossible to accurately measure criminal desistance/persistence it is generally accepted that such measures as utilising police databases are acceptable proxies for determining patterns of offending (Richards, 2011). Hence, the presented examination of the Western Australian Police Information Management System (IMS) offender dataset provides new insights into the crime desistance/persistence patterns of a common group of entrant offenders, namely graffitists.

Desistant and persistent patterns of offending

Much of the existing body of juvenile desistance/persistence research literature has concentrated on unravelling the underlying causes of offending. As a consequence, four main offending risk factor categories have been identified, namely, *static personal risk factors* (e.g. age at time of first conviction, male gender, intelligence quotient, neuropsychological characteristics), *static environmental factors* (e.g. low socioeconomic status, parental neglect, parental conflict, institutional maltreatment, care and protection orders, physical/sexual abuse), *dynamic personal risk factors* (e.g. psychopathological conduct/attentional disorders, antisocial personality traits, substance abuse), and *dynamic environmental risk factors* (e.g. poor social environment, poor economic circumstance, neighbourhood disadvantage, membership of a criminogenic family, family instability, association with delinquent peers). Moreover, it is also recognised that when these factors co-occur then juveniles are more disposed towards recidivist offending (Cottle *et al.*, 2001; Palermo, 2009; Mulder *et al.*, 2010; 2011).

Static risk factors differ from dynamic risk factors insofar as they are those factors that cannot be changed in a person's life, while dynamic factors are those that can be altered through intervention. For example, the static risk factor '*commencement age of offending*' is argued to be one of the strongest individual predictors of whether a novice offender will go on to become part of the very small cohort of highly prolific offenders who start offending in childhood and persist with their offending through adolescence/adulthood, or whether they will form part of the much larger, but less prolific, cohort of juvenile offenders whose span of offending is limited to adolescence (Moffitt, 1993). The childhood early-onset life-course persistent pattern

offender (LCP) usually has multiple *static* and *dynamic* high-risk factors (e.g., severe family hardship/dysfunction, hyperactivity, neuropsychological deficits, low self-control, social isolation) and, because of the persistence and severity of their offending, this group are considered to be the most problematic for society (Mulder *et al.*, 2011), while their adolescent limited (AL) pattern offending counterparts are believed to be motivated to engage in criminal acts of antisociality by the teenage desire of establishing a non-conforming social identity (Henry *et al.*, 1996; Carroll *et al.*, 2009; Taylor *et al.*, 2010; Taylor, 2012). However, given that this teenage identity establishment desire is the providence of adolescence, AL offenders exiting their teens are thought to lack the compunction to continue with their offending into adulthood and so are deemed to ‘age out of crime’ (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Moffitt, 1993; 2003; 2006; Stuewig, 2000; Odgers *et al.*, 2007; J-F, 2010). Furthermore, the crimes that AL pattern offenders commit tend to be less frequent, less violent and more situational in nature (Carroll *et al.*, 2009).

It is reasoned that LCP offenders, with their multiple *static* and *dynamic* risk factors, have very different personal and environmental needs than those of their AL offending counterparts. As such, there is a growing need for research studies (such as the present one) to tease out different age-related desistance/persistence patterns of offending. Complicating such research endeavours is the reality that the static and dynamic factors that influence desistance/persistence patterns of offending can vary from individual to individual and from context to context (J-F, 2010), a further complication being that no clear definition exists as to what constitutes criminal desistance or persistence. More surprising still is that there is no academic consensus on how long an individual needs to have stopped offending before they can be termed a ‘desister’, or, conversely, how long an offender needs to continue offending in order to be termed a ‘persister’ (Chanter, 2008).

In an attempt to provide clarification, initially Maruna (2001) and later Mulvey and colleagues (2004) described desistance in terms of it being a voluntary termination of criminal offending that results in an observable and marked decrease in the frequency of offending (J-F, 2010). Moreover, this decrease in offending occurs to the extent that no further (or only negligible) involvement in crime is recorded over an extended period of time. (No clarification, however, is provided as to the length of the extended period of time). The motivation to engage in the desistance process itself typically arises out of an offender’s shift

away from self-absorption to an emergent concern for others (J-F, 2010). As such, desistance is considered to be a protracted process of untangling associations formed with offending mates and curtailing personal urges to commit crimes (J-F, 2010), even though having made a conscious decision to stop offending it is also commonplace for offenders embarking on the desistance process to continue to engage in periodic bouts of offending. Typically, though, these bouts decrease over time both in terms of their frequency and severity (Matza, 1964; Mulvey *et al.*, 2004).

When it comes to making a theoretical distinction between a persistent and a desistant offender, Farrington (1996) suggests that persistent offenders are individuals with three or more recorded convictions. In contrast, Hagell and Newburn (1994) propose a persistent offender to be a person who has a minimum of three arrests in one year, while Soothill and colleagues (2003) argue that a persistent offender is a person with three recorded divided sentences over an eight-year period. Arnall and colleagues (2005) have proposed that a persistent offender is a young person aged 10–17 years who has been sentenced on three or more occasions for one or more recordable offence within a three-year period. More recently still, Newburn (2007) has sought to further redefine the persistent offender by delineating two persistency categories, namely the prolific-persistent offender (i.e. an offender with six or more offences within a year) and the serious-persistent offender (i.e. an offender committing a variety of offences within a 12-month period) (J-F, 2010). Finally, recidivist offenders, who persist over time in their offending, tend to undergo a shift (i.e. displacement) in the types of crime that they commit (Massoglia, 2006). For instance, juvenile acts of antisociality or alcohol-fuelled violence are often displaced in adulthood by behaviours that require far less high-risk physical activity such as illegal drug use (J-F, 2010).

Although this preliminary body of research has been instrumental in establishing the constructs of desistance and persistence within the juvenile and adult offending populations, clearly there is a pressing need for further research, particularly in relation to comparing the desistance/persistence patterns of female offenders with those of their male offending counterparts (Piquero & Chung, 2001). In this regard, this paper aims to extend current understanding of juvenile crime desistance/persistence by examining the offending patterns of new entrants (graffitists) into the criminal justice system (Taylor *et al.*, 2011). To this end, descriptive and chi-squared statistics are used to

analyse the number of offences committed by male and female graffiti offenders (n=667) in relation to the number of recorded contacts offenders had with police over a six-year recording period. The method used is described below.

Method

Upon gaining approval from the University's Human Research Ethics Committee, a research agreement was initiated with the Western Australian Police Research Unit to examine their IMS criminal offending database. The extracted de-identified data related to 41,861 offences committed by 3,751 graffiti offenders over a six-year offending period (2003–9). From the total database sample of 3,751 offenders, 575 females whose first offence was for graffiti were extracted. From these 575 females, 335 were extracted who had between 1 and 20 recorded contacts with police. A matching number of males were similarly extracted. Three of the 335 females were subsequently dropped from the study due to incomplete data.

The extracted dataset of 667 offenders (332 females and 335 males) included details on the *type* of offences committed (see Table 2) and the recorded *report action* taken by police. In terms of these reports, four levels of action were differentiated. The first level, *Level 0*, relates to reports where no recorded action was taken beyond entering the offence into the IMS database as a non-actioned offence (e.g. statute barred from prosecution, not criminally responsible, not in the public interest to proceed); the second level, *Level 1*, relates to report actions that were cautionary in intent (e.g. oral or written cautions); the third level, *Level 2*, relates to report actions that were re-directive in nature (e.g. Juvenile Justice Team [JJT] referrals); and the fourth level, *Level 3*, relates to report actions that were judicially oriented (e.g. summons, arrest).

In order to re-enter the dataset into PASW (formerly SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) a decision was made to delineate three categories of offender – namely, an *Early Desisters* category (i.e. offenders with 1–2 separately dated recorded contacts with police), a *Limited Persisters* category (i.e. offenders with 3–7 separately dated recorded contacts with police) and a *Chronic Persisters* category (i.e. offenders with 8–20 separately dated recorded contacts with police).

Furthermore, data was also categorised by *age-group*. In this regard, offenders were divided into three age cohorts: a *preteen* cohort (i.e. offenders <13 years at the time of their first graffiti offence), an *adolescent* cohort (i.e. offenders aged 13–17 years at

the time of their first graffiti offence) and an *adult* cohort (i.e. offenders aged 18+ years at the time of their first graffiti offence). As it was also of interest to determine over how many years each offender's offences were committed, a value of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6 for the variable '*offence year*' was calculated. This allowed the calculation of the span of offending for each offender following their first graffiti offence.

Finally, in pursuit of the study's aim of investigating graffiti offenders' patterns of crime desistance/persistence, the following four research questions were devised:

1. Which age-group of graffiti offenders (preteen, adolescent, adult) commits the most crimes and comes into contact with police most frequently?
2. Which category of graffiti offenders (Early Desisters, Limited Persisters, Chronic Persisters) commits the most crimes and comes into contact with police most frequently?
3. Is gender a facet of early desistance/persistence?
4. Do age-group and category type differences exist in the start, interim and end police-recorded actions for female and male offenders?

These questions were subsequently used to guide the analysis.

Results

In response to Question 1, frequency counts of the 667 offenders revealed that at the time of their first graffiti offence their ages ranged from 10–58 years (mean age = 14 years). The largest age-group was the adolescents ($n=485$), who comprised 73% of the sample, while the preteens ($n=123$) and the adults ($n=59$) respectively comprised the remaining 18% and 9% (see Table 1). Moreover, as the preteens and adolescents collectively accounted for 91% of all of the offences committed, clearly graffiti-writing is predominantly a juvenile crime.

In response to Question 2, frequency count analysis revealed that the majority ($n=474$, 74%) of the sample's offenders were Early Desisters, 62% of whom ceased from any further offending after their initial contact with police, while the remaining 38% ceased offending after their second contact. The second largest group of offenders were the Limited Persisters ($n=144$), and the smallest group were the Chronic Persisters ($n=29$).

Furthermore, Table 2 reveals that while 79% of all offences committed by Early Desisters were for graffiti and property damage, the most common offences committed by Limited and

Table 1 Frequency counts by *age-group* and *offender type* of offences and police contacts

Age-group	Gender	# of offenders	# offences committed	# of police contacts
Preteens		123 (18%)	673 (24%)	371 (24%)
	Female	57 (46%)	256 (38%)	149 (40%)
	Male	66 (54%)	417 (62%)	222 (60%)
Adolescents		485 (73%)	1,948 (69%)	1,086 (69%)
	Female	246 (51%)	907 (47%)	530 (49%)
	Male	239 (49%)	1,041 (53%)	556 (51%)
Adults		59 (9%)	187 (7%)	108 (7%)
	Female	29 (49%)	128 (68%)	68 (63%)
	Male	30 (51%)	59 (32%)	40 (37%)
	Total	667	2,808	1,565

Offending type	Age-group	# of offenders	# offences committed	# of police contacts
Early Desisters		494 (74%)	798 (28%)	585 (38%)
	Preteens	87 (18%)	136 (17%)	107 (18%)
	Adolescents	360 (73%)	575 (72%)	426 (73%)
	Adults	47 (9%)	87 (11%)	52 (9%)
Limited Persisters		144 (22%)	1,232 (44%)	631 (40%)
	Preteens	23 (16%)	192 (16%)	106 (17%)
	Adolescents	110 (76%)	954 (77%)	477 (76%)
	Adults	11 (8%)	86 (7%)	48 (7%)
Chronic Persisters		29 (4%)	778 (28%)	349 (22%)
	Preteens	13 (45%)	345 (44%)	158 (45%)
	Adolescents	15 (52%)	419 (54%)	183 (53%)
	Adults	1 (3%)	14 (2%)	8 (2%)
	Total	667	2,808	1,565

Chronic Persisters were assault, burglary and theft. Moreover, as can be seen from the shaded offence lines in Table 2, Limited Persisters committed 298 (67%) of the total 446 recorded violent offences. In addition, chi-squared analysis reveals a significant association between the type of offence (violent, non-violent) and whether the perpetrators were Early Desisters, Limited Persisters or Chronic Persisters $\{\chi^2=150.01 (2), p=.0001\}$.

In response to Question 3, Table 1 reveals that the majority of male offenders started their offending during adolescence. In addition, chi-squared analysis reveals a significant association

Table 2 Early Desisters, Limited Persisters and Chronic Persisters patterns of offending

Offence Types	494 Early Desisters			144 Limited Persisters			29 Chronic Persisters		
	1st offence	2nd-14th offences	1st offence	2nd-36th offences	1st offence	2nd-100th offences			
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Arson			1	(0.1)	0	-	3	(0.4)	
Assault	21	(3)	247	(20)	85	(11)	85	(11)	
Burglary	24	(3)	166	(13)	182	(23)	182	(23)	
Criminal Intent	17	(2)	22	(2)	8	(1)	8	(1)	
Deception	2	(0.3)	5	(0.4)	8	(1)	8	(1)	
Deprivation of Liberty	0	-	3	(0.2)	0	-	0	-	
Disorderly Conduct	10	(1)	17	(1)	15	(2)	15	(2)	
Drug Offences	22	(3)	58	(5)	24	(3)	24	(3)	
Fraud	1	(0.1)	2	(0.2)	1	(0.1)	1	(0.1)	
Graffiti	494	(62)	89	(11)	144	(12)	29	(4)	
Liquor Licensing Offence	0	-	1	(0.1)	0	-	0	-	
Justice Procedure Offences	4	(0.5)	13	(1)	7	(1)	7	(1)	
Motor Vehicle Theft	14	(0.8)	19	(2)	59	(8)	59	(8)	
Non-Reported Offences	8	(1)	68	(6)	64	(8)	64	(8)	
Property Damage	41	(5)	97	(8)	63	(8)	63	(8)	
Robbery	0	-	24	(2)	12	(2)	12	(2)	
Sexual Assault	0	-	4	(0.3)	5	(0.6)	5	(0.6)	
Theft	18	(2)	121	(10)	81	(10)	81	(10)	
Threatening Behaviour	9	(1)	14	(1)	11	(1)	11	(1)	
Traffic Offences	1	(0.1)	12	(1)	1	(0.1)	1	(0.1)	
Trespass	22	(3)	43	(3)	49	(6)	49	(6)	
Weapon Offences	0	-	6	(0.5)	1	(0.1)	1	(0.1)	
<i>Total offences</i>	798		1232		778		778		

Shading = violent offences

between gender and the number of contacts with police $\{\chi^2=19.06 (2), p=.0001\}$, and gender and the number of offences committed $\{\chi^2=55.36 (2), p=.0001\}$. It is also apparent from Table 1 that male offenders who began offending in their preteen years tend to commit more offences and have more contacts with police than do their preteen female offending age-mates. In contrast, female graffitiists who commence their graffiti offending as an adult, commit offences and come into contact with police at a rate nearly double that of their adult male counterparts. In terms of the length of time of offending, frequency count analysis revealed that 229 females and 242 males had a 1-year offending span; 40 females and 39 males had a 2-year offending span; 37 females and 24 males had a 3-year offending span; 16 females and 23 males had a 4-year offending span; 9 females and 5 males had a 5-year offending span and 1 female and 2 males had a 6-year offending span.

Figure 1 provides a visual illustration of gender differences in the levels of police report action for offences committed by Early Desisters ($n=389$ female and 409 male offences), Limited Persisters ($n=695$ female and 537 male offences) and Chronic Persisters ($n=207$ female and 571 male offences). Chi-squared analysis additionally reveals no association between gender and levels of police report action among female and male Early Desisters and Limited Persisters. However, an association is evident between gender and levels of police report action among female and male Chronic Persisters $\{\chi^2=19.22 (2), p=.0001\}$.

Finally, in response to Question 4, Table 3 provides the statistical means of the number of offences, and the number of contacts with police, had by female and male Early Desisters, Limited Persisters and Chronic Persisters per age-group. An increasing trend pattern is evident within each of the three age-groups, insofar as the lowest mean number of recorded offences (i.e. *preteens*: female 1.71 – male 1.43; *adolescents*: female 1.56 – male 1.64; and *adults*: female 2.05 – male 1.71) and the lowest mean number of recorded contacts with police (i.e. *preteens*: female 1.22 – male 1.24; *adolescents*: female 1.20 – male 1.17; and *adults*: female 1.11 – male 1.11) occur within the Early Desisters offending category; and the highest mean number of recorded offences (i.e. *preteens*: female 23.50 – male 27.89; *adolescents*: female 19.80 – male 32.00; and *adults*: female 14.00 – male 5.50) and the highest mean number of recorded contacts with police (i.e. *preteens*: female 12.75 – male 11.89; *adolescents*: female 10.40 – male 13.10; and *adults*: female

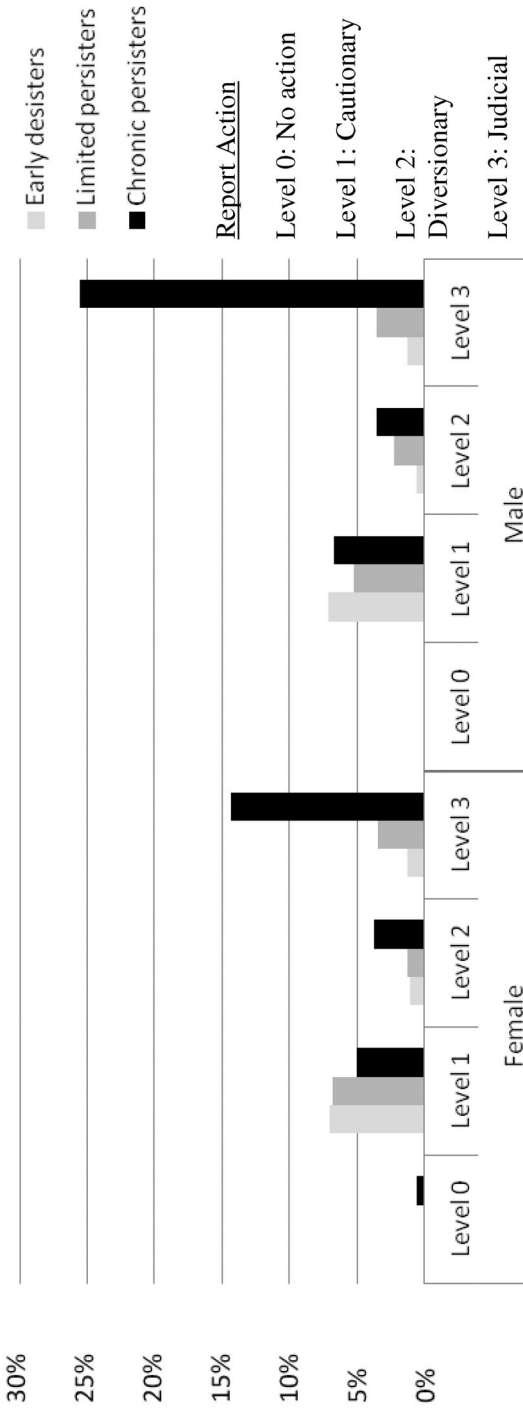


Figure 1 Levels of police report action recorded for *Early Desisters*, *Limited Persisters* and *Chronic Persisters* by gender

Table 3 Early Desisters, Limited Persisters and Chronic Persisters patterns of offending

	Number of offences committed (n=2,808)						Number of contacts with police (n=1,565)					
	Females (n=332)			Males (n= 335)			Females (n=747)			Males (n= 818)		
	Early Desisters (n=41)	Limited Persisters (n=12)	Chronic Persisters (n=4)	Early Desisters (n=46)	Limited Persisters (n=11)	Chronic Persisters (n=9)	Early Desisters (n=41)	Limited Persisters (n=12)	Chronic Persisters (n=4)	Early Desisters (n=46)	Limited Persisters (n=11)	Chronic Persisters (n=9)
Preteens (n=123)												
Mean	1.71	7.67	23.50	1.43	9.09	27.89	1.22	4.00	12.75	1.24	5.27	11.89
SD	1.48	4.92	7.72	0.80	4.08	14.97	0.41	1.53	2.98	0.43	1.55	3.82
Median	1	6.5	27	1	7	20	1	3	13	1	6	10
Min	1	3	12	1	3	9	1	3	9	1	3	8
Max	7	19	28	4	17	57	2	7	16	2	7	18
Sum	70	92	94	66	100	251	50	48	51	57	58	107
Total	256 offences			417 offences			149 contacts			222 contacts		

continued overleaf

Table 3 continued

	Number of offences committed (n=2,808)						Number of contacts with police (n=1,565)						
	Females (n=332)			Males (n=335)			Females (n=747)			Males (n=818)			
	Early Desisters (n=180)	Limited Persisters (n=61)	Chronic Persisters (n=5)	Early Desisters (n=180)	Limited Persisters (n=49)	Chronic Persisters (n=10)	Early Desisters (n=180)	Limited Persisters (n=61)	Chronic Persisters (n=5)	Early Desisters (n=180)	Limited Persisters (n=49)	Chronic Persisters (n=10)	
Adolescents (n=485)													
Mean	1.56	8.66	19.80	1.64	8.69	32.00	1.20	4.30	10.40	1.17	4.39	13.10	
SD	1.19	6.55	9.20	1.59	5.17	25.70	0.40	1.32	3.71	0.37	1.42	3.66	
Median	1	7	18	1	8	21	1	4	9	1	4	12.50	
Min	1	3	11	1	3	13	1	3	8	1	3	8	
Max	11	36	34	14	26	100	2	7	17	2	7	20	
Sum	280	528	99	295	426	320	216	262	52	210	215	131	
Total	907 offences						530 contacts			556 contacts			
Adults (n=59)													
Mean	2.05	8.33	14.00	1.71	5.50	-	1.11	4.33	8.00	1.11	4.50	-	
SD	1.71	4.00	-	1.51	2.12	-	0.31	1.22	-	0.31	0.70	-	
Median	1	7	14	1	5.5	-	1	4	8	1	4.5	-	
Min	1	3	14	1	4	-	1	3	8	1	4	-	
Max	7	14	14	8	7	-	2	6	8	2	5	-	
Sum	39	75	14	48	11	0	21	39	8	31	9	0	
Total	128 offences						59 offences			68 contacts			40 contacts

8.00 – male 4.50) occur within the Chronic Persisters offending category.

Figure 2 provides a visual illustration of age-group differences in the levels of police report actions for offences committed by Early Desisters ($n=136$ preteen, 575 adolescent and 87 adult offences), Limited Persisters ($n=192$ preteen, 954 adolescent and 86 adult offences) and Chronic Persisters ($n=345$ preteen, 419 adolescent and 14 adult offences). Chi-squared analysis reveals an association between age-group and levels of police report actions among preteen, adolescent and adult Early Desisters $\{x^2=362.6 (4), p=.0001\}$ and among preteen, adolescent and adult Limited Persisters $\{x^2=334.56 (4), p=.0001\}$.

To determine Early Desisters', Limited Persisters' and Chronic Persisters' interim levels of offending within all three age-groups, a further frequency count was conducted of all offences committed in the interim period between the offenders' first and last offences. For example, an interim offence for Early Desisters would be any additional offence entered into the database after their first recorded (start) offence and before their last recorded (end) offence that occurred either at the time of their first point of contact with police or at their second point of contact with police. Similarly, an interim offence for Limited Persisters would be any additional offence entered into the database after their first recorded (start) offence and before their last recorded (end) offence that occurred any time between their first and seventh point of contact with police. For Chronic Persisters interim offences would be any additional offence entered into the database after their first recorded (start) offence and before their last recorded (end) offence that occurred at any time between their first and twentieth contact with police.

Figure 3, comprising nine mini-graphs, displays a comparison analysis of the three age-groups and the three categories of offenders' start, interim and end levels of offence action recorded by police. The three preteen age-group graphs and the three adolescent graphs reveal that the majority of all juvenile offenders typically attract a caution for their initial (start) offence of graffiti (i.e. *preteens*: Early Desisters 92%, Limited Persisters 100% and Chronic Persisters 77%; *adolescents*: Early Desisters 82%, Limited Persisters 75% and Chronic Persisters 73%). In contrast, the start, interim and end adult offender graphs reveal that nearly all adults received a Level 3 report action not only for their initial graffiti offence but also for their interim and end offences.

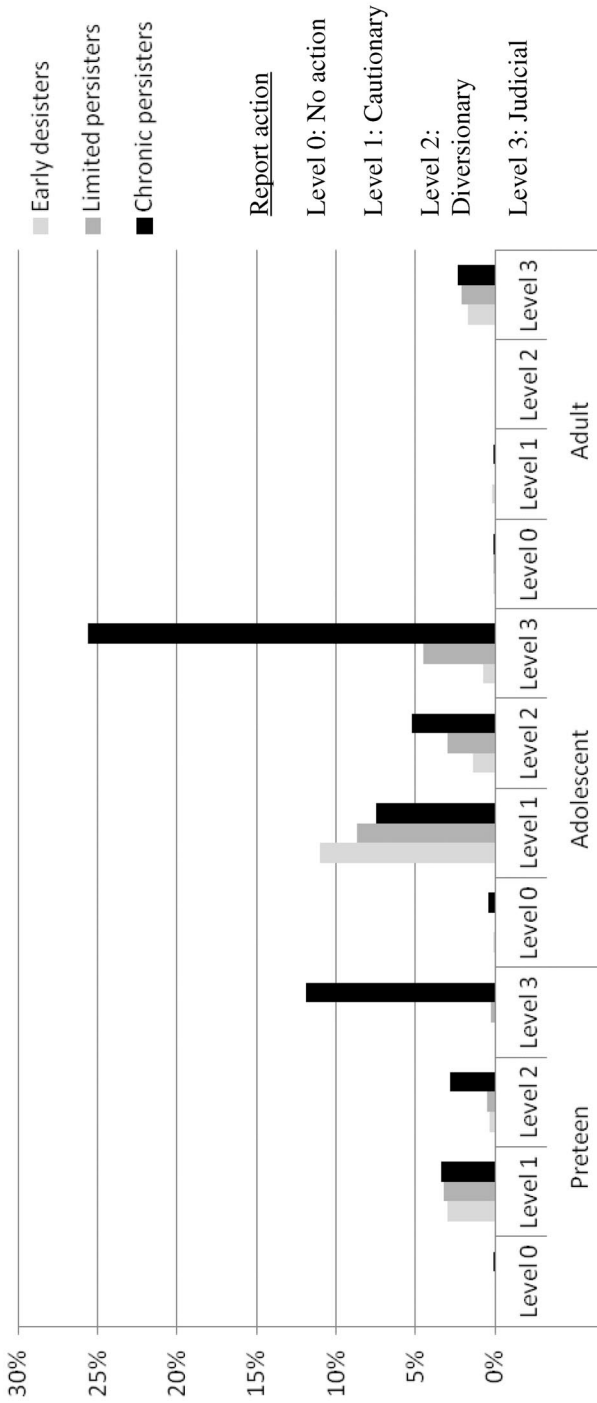


Figure 2 Levels of police report action recorded for *Early Desisters, Limited Persisters and Chronic Persisters* by age-group

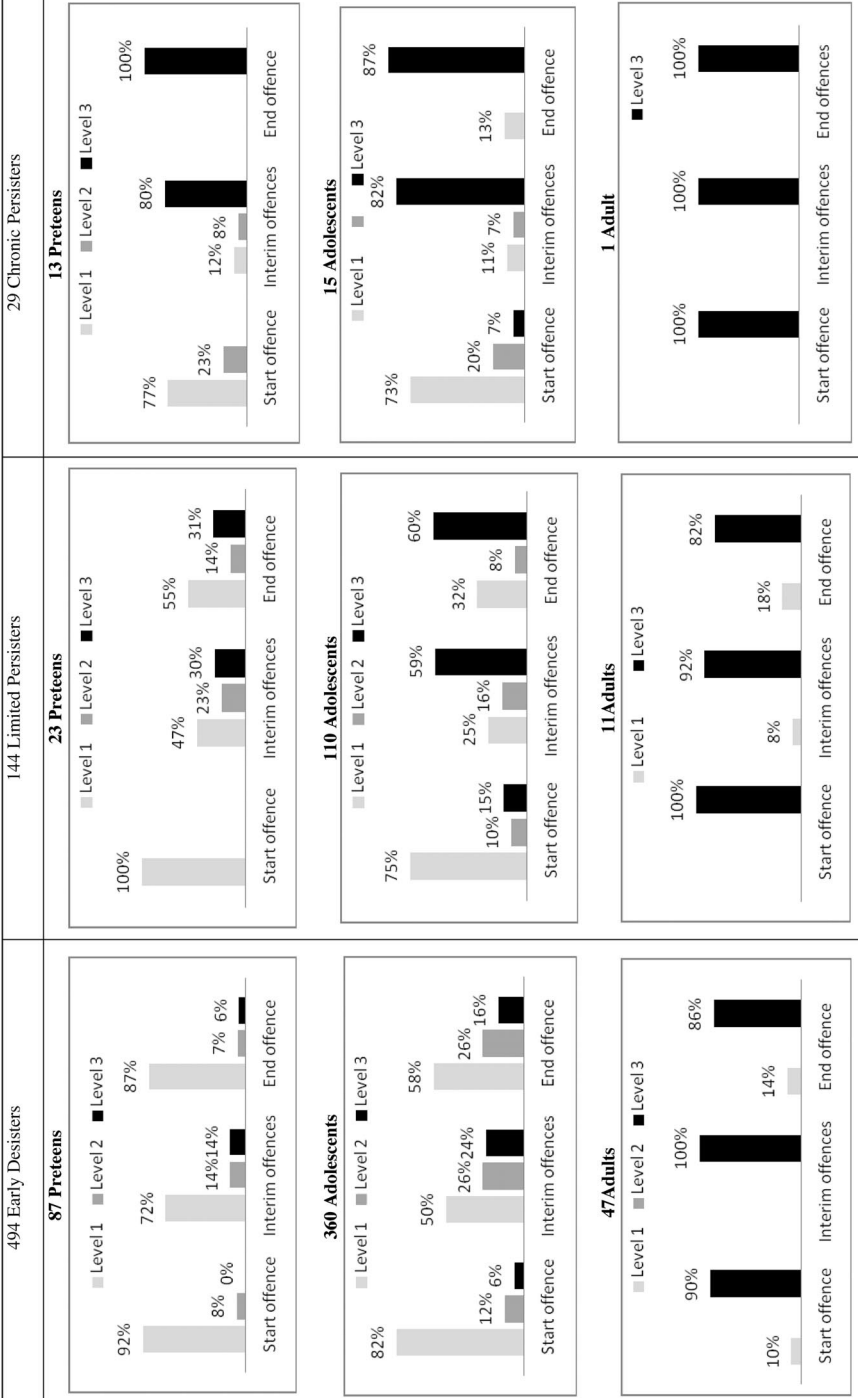


Figure 3 *Early Desisters, Limited Persisters, and Chronic Persisters Level 1 Cautionary, Level 2 Re-directive, and Level 3 Judicial, start, interim and end recorded offence actions*

In addition, Figure 3 also reveals that preteen Early Desisters are more likely to receive a Level 1 caution for their interim offences than they are to receive either a Level 2 re-directive referral to JJT (Juvenile Justice Team) or a Level 3 judicial report action. However, the likelihood of preteen Chronic Persisters receiving a Level 1 cautionary interim report action was poor, as 80% of preteen Chronic Persisters' interim offences and 100% of their end offences were a Level 3 judicial interim report action. In contrast, adolescent Early Desisters had a 50% likelihood of a Level 1 interim caution, Limited Persisters a 25% likelihood and Chronic Persisters a 11% likelihood. Similarly, the likelihood of a Level 2 interim re-directive JJT referral report action decreased from 26% for adolescent Early Desisters to 16% for adolescent Limited Persisters, and to 7% for adolescent Chronic Persisters. This decreasing trend was reversed when it came to the likelihood of receiving a Level 3 interim judicially oriented report action, as the likelihood rose from 24% for adolescent Early Desisters to 59% for adolescent Limited Persisters, and to 82% for adolescent Chronic Persisters.

Finally, Figure 3 reveals that only preteen Early Desisters, preteen Limited Persisters and adolescent Early Desisters had a greater than 50% likelihood of receiving a Level 1 cautionary report action for their final (end) offence, while all of the remaining age-group categories had a 60% or greater likelihood of receiving a Level 3 judicial report action for their final (end) offence.

Discussion

Much is expected of the various arms of the police and justice system. On the one hand they are charged with keeping communities safe and with ensuring that responses to crime are proportionate to the offences committed, while on the other hand they are charged with the task of keeping offenders' longer-term best interests in mind (Mulvey *et al.*, 2004). In relation to juvenile offenders, one of the problems facing police and the Juvenile Justice System is that there is only a comparatively small pool of empirical desistance/persistence research literature relating specifically to juveniles to which they can refer. As a consequence, Mulvey and colleagues suggest that adolescent offenders are typically processed and handled using common-sense guidelines that have been developed over a number of years based on repeated policy procedures and practice reviews.

In the context of Western Australia, newly offending juveniles who are processed for relatively 'minor' crimes typically receive cautions or are redirected into diversionary programmes while their more persistent offending peers are processed through the court system. Mulder and colleagues (2010) support the use of such an approach as it distinguishes between the differing needs of novice and prolific juvenile offenders. Indeed, they specifically caution against viewing/treating all juvenile offenders as a single homogeneous entity, claiming that different categories of juvenile offender have very different *static* and *dynamic* risk factors for re-offending.

Interestingly, though, not all young people who appear to be at high risk for engaging in lifelong criminal offending actually proceed along that pathway. Whilst some theorists such as Moffitt (1993) suggest most adolescents 'age out of' crime, there are other theorists who note that other at-risk juveniles, despite experiencing considerable personal adversity, are able to draw on a number of personal, family and community resilience factors to alter or halt their likely trajectory towards life-course offending. Indeed, it is hypothesised that it is the offender's personal resilience quotient that is key to their receptiveness and progressive engagement in intervention programmes (Cottle *et al.*, 2001). Typically, personal resilience includes such attributes as critical mindedness, agentic engagement, flexibility and communal collectivism (Unger, 2010; 2011).

The results of the present study reveal that almost three-quarters of preteen, adolescent and adult graffiti offenders seemingly desist from further offending after only their first or second contact with police. Clearly, further qualitative research studies are needed to elicit from early desistant graffiti offenders how they utilised their resilience attributes to reach a decision to cease offending. The results of such studies will increase the understanding of the role that police, family and youth intervention programmes play in the novice offender's decision-making.

A second result from the present study which has application relevance to reducing recidivist offending is the revelation that two-thirds of the offences committed by Limited Persisters are violent offences. It is posited by Deuchar (2009) that collective involvement in violent activities by groups of young persistent offenders not only provides them with stocks of compensatory social capital, but also leads to the ready assimilation of their youth street culture's social norms. Clearly, further research is needed to ascertain greater insights from this offending youth

cohort as to why, when and how the transition from non-violent to violent offending occurs. The value of such research is that it could inform the design of intervention programmes (e.g. for anger management, social inclusion, etc.) targeted at the transitioning cohort of pre-violent offending adolescent.

Certainly, Mulvey and colleagues (2004) have long suggested that interventional initiatives aimed at reducing juvenile recidivist offending need to be informed by the changing personal social capital needs of offenders and of the social climate in which they live and operate. This need, along with a greater understanding of the factors which contribute to resilience building in novice offenders, is predicated on the realisation that the present tendency to employ progressively harsh and punitive approaches to dealing with juvenile offenders is not necessarily producing the desired social outcome, namely, offending cessation (see Carroll *et al.*, 2009; Deuchar, 2009; Taylor *et al.*, 2010). For example, the Western Australian practice of punitively progressing novice, intermediate and seasoned graffiti offenders through the court system for their offences has not, in many instances, ceased their offending. Indeed, it would seem that the practice of awarding increasingly severe punishments has resulted in some unintended outcomes. For instance, the recently enacted Western Australian measure of 'banning' juvenile graffiti artists from the site of their graffiti offending (e.g. shopping centre, public transport system) has not become the desistance catalyst it was intended to be, primarily, it seems, because the banning measure has in some instances oriented the banned offender towards the company of their more prolific offending age-mates. Moreover, this association is placing novice offenders on a trajectory towards more serious and persistent offending (Taylor *et al.*, 2011). Anecdotal accounts from graffiti offenders reveal that the act of being banned is providing banned individuals with an elevated level of street kudos (non-conforming social notoriety) (see Taylor *et al.*, 2010). In turn, this elevation is producing two further unintended consequences. First, unless the underlying offending *dynamic* causal needs of the banned novice offender (potential Early Desisters) are met, then the now 'noticed' novice is likely to be attracted towards taking up the ensuing invitations to join established graffiti crews that notoriety often brings. Once inducted into a crew, the banned novice offender receives encouragement and opportunity to 'get up' (i.e. place their tag or have it placed in positions of high visual prominence) from the crew's members. Continued association with crew members

invariably leads to recidivist offending and the banned individual seemingly moves into the realm of the Limited Persister offender. Second, the camaraderie and social recognition within the graffiti community that increased notoriety brings is addictive (Taylor, 2012). Continued involvement in the subculture and repeated engagements in escalating graffiti-related offences (i.e. property damage, theft, assaults) ultimately provides the banned individual with the highly prized 'graffer' social identity and a sense of belonging, purpose and protection. Once gained, maintenance of one's recognitional status among the graffiti subculture requires a commitment to the graffiti lifestyle. In this regard, those graffitiists who are bent upon maintaining a subculture reputation characteristically tend to become society's long-term persistent offenders (Taylor *et al.*, 2010).

High recidivism rates (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002) among chronically persisting offenders have led some criminologists to question whether incarcerating juveniles in the early stages of their offending is a cost-effective means of dealing with recidivism (Farrall, 2004; Allen, 2006; Chanter, 2008; J-F, 2010; Palermo, 2009). It has been further posited that the implementation of increasingly harsh punitive punishments for relatively minor offences is setting young offenders up for 'failure' (Carrington & Schulenberg, 2003). Other criminologists still caution that the move towards popular punitivism can allow the public/media's retribitional views to supersede the fundamental rehabilitation needs of juvenile offenders. Concerns have also been raised about the practice of juvenile detention/incarceration, claiming that it has the potential to interrupt normal child/adolescent developmental processes, reinforce delinquent attitudes and create the ingredients for bullying and racist behaviours in the future (Garland, 2001; Shulenberg, 2003; Allen, 2006).

Other researchers such as Halsey & Young (2006) have gone as far as to suggest that society's current response to juvenile graffiti crime is largely ungovernable and that new approaches to desistance need to be considered. In light of the present study's finding that approximately 75% of all novice offenders desist from any further offending after their first or second contact with police, it is the authors' contention that more research is needed to better understand what is happening in the lives of these *Early Desisting* offenders, the reasoning being that if such an understanding is developed it is likely to hold three important societal benefits. First, it will help to provide an understanding of the support systems young people say they need in order to live

crime-free lives. Second, it will allow these identified support 'needs' to be incorporated into crime prevention and youth diversion programmes, and third, it will allow for the better tailoring of individualised programmes for offenders caught in the loop of wanting to desist from offending, but yet still continuing with their offending because they lack internal motivation and positive external supports.

Limitations of the study

While the presented study provides valuable insights into graffiti offenders' desistance/persistence patterns of offending, it must be noted that the research has a number of limitations. First, there are no universal measures for youth desistance/persistence and so the study's three offending type divisions (i.e. *Early Desisters*, *Limited Persisters* and *Chronic Persisters*) are pertinent to this study only. Second, given that up to 98% of all juvenile delinquent offending never appears on police databases (Carroll *et al.*, 2008; Friendship *et al.*, 2002), analysis of police datasets can only be considered as a partial indicator of increased/decreased recidivist offending. Third, the use of proxy measures of offending desistance/persistence (e.g. police databases) can distort the true patterns of desistance/persistence among offenders, as recidivist offenders tend to learn from their prior apprehension experiences and then tend to engage in covert, less detectable types of offence, which can result in a false assessment that their offending patterns have ceased/decreased (Cunneen & Luke, 2007; Hedderman, 2009; Tresidder *et al.*, 2009; J-F, 2010). Fourth, while the police report data might provide indicative desistant and persistent patterns of offending, they might also be reflective of other extraneous factors, such as offenders committing less detectable offences and changes in the processing practices of offenders (Richards, 2011).

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