

An Investigation of the Association between Child Abuse, Neglect and Youth Offending in
South Australia

Catia Gaetana Malvaso
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Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences
The University of Adelaide
Australia

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Abstract

The association between childhood exposure to maltreatment and the subsequent development of delinquent or criminal behaviours is well established. However, in Australia, there have been few longitudinal studies that have examined this association. Therefore, the overarching aim of this thesis was to explore the maltreatment-offending association in an Australian jurisdiction. To provide context for the empirical work which follows, this thesis commences with two systematic reviews of prospective and longitudinal studies that have examined the maltreatment-offending association. The objective of the first review was to critically review the design and methodological features of studies and how these features influence conclusions drawn. The second aimed to synthesize the evidence for different maltreatment and out-of-home care (OHC) placement factors, as well as other individual, social and contextual factors, shown to play a role in explaining associations between maltreatment and offending. The second part of this thesis then summarises the findings of a data linkage project based on administrative and survey data obtained from South Australia's child protection and youth justice systems. These findings are set out in three studies.

The primary aims of these three studies were: 1) To determine the overlap between child protection and youth justice involvement in South Australia; 2) To determine how substantiated maltreatment and variations in these experiences (i.e., the type, timing and recurrence of maltreatment) related to overall convictions; 3) To explore the extent to which placement in OHC and variations in these experiences (i.e., the type of care, timing of placements and their duration or stability) related to different types of convictions (i.e., violent, property, drug and breach offences); 4) To explore how gender and ethnicity moderated the maltreatment-offending association; and 5) To investigate the role of maltreatment and placement variables on violent convictions after controlling for other known individual and social correlates of crime.

Findings from the first study indicated that, compared to a general population estimate, the odds of having a conviction were significantly greater for individuals for whom child protection notifications or substantiations were made, and for those placed in OHC. The strongest predictors of convictions among maltreated young people were: male gender, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ethnicity, physical abuse, maltreatment recurrence, persistent maltreatment and placement in OHC. In the second study, gender, ethnicity and placement factors were found to moderate the relationship between maltreatment and convictions, although associations varied systematically according to the

type of conviction examined. The findings from the third study demonstrated that demographic factors (male gender and Indigenous ethnicity), maltreatment factors (physical abuse and persistent maltreatment), family background factors (household conflict) and individual characteristics (anger and aggression) were all strongly associated with violent convictions.

Findings from this thesis point to the complex and multifactorial nature of the maltreatment-offending association. It is clear that a collaborative and integrated response from both the child protection and youth justice systems is needed in order to prevent and treat the consequences of maltreatment and reduce offending behaviour among young people.

Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

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I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Signed.....

Catia Gaetana Malvaso (Candidate)

Date..... 10th February 2017

List of publications contributing to this thesis

Malvaso, C. G., Delfabbro, P., & Day, A. (2015). The maltreatment-offending association: A systematic review of the methodological features of prospective and longitudinal studies. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*. doi: 10.1177/1524838015620820

Malvaso, C. G., Delfabbro, P., & Day, A. (2016). Risk factors that influence the maltreatment-offending association: A systematic review of prospective and longitudinal studies. *Aggression & Violent Behavior*. doi: 10.1016/j.avb.2016.06.006

Malvaso, C.G., Delfabbro, P.H, Day, A. (2017). The child protection and juvenile justice nexus in Australia: A longitudinal examination of the relationship between maltreatment and offending. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 64, 32-46. doi: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2016.11.02.

Malvaso, C.G., Delfabbro, P.H, Day, A. (2017). Child maltreatment and criminal convictions in youth: The role of gender, ethnicity and placement experiences in an Australian population. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 73, 57-65. doi: 10.1016/j.chilyouth.2016.12.

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Malvaso, C.G. (2015, November). Risk factors that influence the maltreatment-offending association: A systematic review of prospective and longitudinal studies. Paper presented at the Australian New Zealand Association for Psychology, Psychiatry and Law (ANZAPPL) national conference, Canberra, Australia.

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Malvaso, C.G. (2016, October). Associations between maltreatment and youth offending. Paper presented at the Department of Child Protection Research Seminar, Hindmarsh, South Australia, Australia.

Malvaso, C.G. (2016, July). The link between childhood maltreatment and juvenile offending. Paper presented at Chapin Hall, University of Chicago, Illinois, United States of America.

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Finally, the data used in this thesis represent real children in our community and their lived experiences; they are not just statistics. The most important objective of this research is to improve outcomes for them and for future generations.

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