

**Violent Crime: an integrated theory of risk and offence process amongst
acquitted mentally ill offenders**

Jessica L. Orenstein

BPsych

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Clinical Psychology, School of Psychology, University of Newcastle,

Australia

June 2015

Statement of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma 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. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University of Newcastle Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Signed:

Date:

Acknowledgement of Authorship

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis contains a manuscript of which I am a joint author. I have included as part of the thesis a written statement, endorsed by my supervisor, attesting to my contribution to the joint publication/scholarly work.

Signed:

Date:

(Endorsed by Supervisor)

Table of contents

Acknowledgements.....5

Abstract.....7

Critical Literature Review 10

Manuscript 29

 Abstract.....31

 Introduction32

 Method.....38

 Results43

 Discussion52

Appendices..... 71

 Appendix A: Ethics Approval71

 Appendix B: Journal Submission Details.....73

Acknowledgements

Completing my Masters thesis is an important step in my learning and career. Overall I am thankful to all of the people below for giving up precious time in their days to ensure that completion is possible.

I firstly owe my gratitude to Derek Gilligan, without whom, this project does not exist. Derek's extensive experience in the field of Forensic Psychology, his knowledge of existing research and his research expertise were fundamental to developing the current research question as well as providing me with extensive guidance in all stages of this project. I am very thankful for the opportunity to work alongside him in this endeavor.

To Sean Halpin. His supervision and guidance have been invaluable. I am extremely grateful for his careful and thorough ongoing critique of my work and for guidance in how to navigate the research world. I have a lot of admiration for Sean as an Academic and Psychologist.

To George Bulley, who dedicated hours of her time to provide an independent assessment of my work. George's work was timely, thorough, extremely valuable and was always carried out with cheerfulness. Her enthusiasm for assisting me and for the current research was an encouragement at a time when I was feeling overwhelmed.

To my proof readers, Natascha, Peter, Cheron, Andrew and Monika. These individuals gave up their time to review this work and saw so many of the little things that I did not. A very valuable contribution, thank you!

My parents, Peter and Cheron Mort, have provided me with a warm, nurturing environment, affording all my needs and much more for the first couple of decades of life. Not only that, they have continued to provide huge amounts of support, in many forms, throughout my university days. I am so thankful for their unconditional love

and I know that this thesis and life in general would have been so much less enjoyable had it not been for them. More recently my parents, along with parents-in-law, Claude and Margaret Orenstein, have provided countless hours of babysitting, without which I can guarantee this thesis would still be a pile of scrap paper. The words of encouragement from you all, as well as my sister Bec and her beautiful family have pushed me along when I've needed it most.

Andrew Orenstein is my husband, best friend and love of my life. I've lost count of the ways he has supported me throughout this thesis. He is a selfless and generous partner that I am extremely thankful for. He has been a sounding board, a listener, a provider, a source of joy and more recently an incredible Dad to our five month old son, Jonty. Thank you

Abstract

Scope

A literature review that examines the history of risk assessment, descriptive process models of crime, theory development in general and the applicability and utility of a theory development approach known as Grounded Theory (GT) begins this thesis. Findings suggest that a body of research predicting risk factors relevant to mentally ill offenders already exists. So too does a theory to explain the offence pathways of mainstream criminals. However, a theory of risk relevant to the forensic mental health system has yet to be developed.

The current study, reported in the manuscript portion of this thesis, specifically examines risk assessment factors relevant to mentally ill offenders and assesses how these factors may be integrated into a theory. The study is limited to men who have been found not guilty by reason of mental illness and specifically relates to those who have committed violent offences. Whilst it uses a method similar to GT, it was beyond the scope of current research to adhere strictly to its procedures.

Purpose

The current study aimed to establish a theory and accompanying model to explain the relationship between risk assessment factors from well-established, actuarial risk assessment tools. The model aimed to provide a description of *how* the historical clinical and contextual factors in an offender's life interact to result in the commission of an offence.

Methodology

A qualitative methodology based on Grounded Theory was used to examine 29 reports written from detailed interviews with each participant. Four standardised risk-assessment tools formed the basis of questions that were asked during interviews,

utilising a Structured Professional Judgement approach. The information gained during interview was coded and categorised using a method devised from previous research. A theory and model describing the offence trajectory was developed from this analysis.

Results

Out of the model emerged four phases that include an individual's genetic predisposition, childhood and adolescence, adulthood and index offence. The interaction between these factors over time was mapped with clinical and contextual factors as well as stressors all being included in the final model. Phase one of the model was termed genetic predisposition and contained information regarding whether or not there was a family history of mental illness. Phase two represented childhood and adolescence and included the clinical factors of school conduct and juvenile behaviour. Phase three represented adulthood and plotted the interaction of major mental illness, social attitudes, treatment and supervision failures, and violence. The final phase represented the index offence and mapped information regarding coping, psychosis, executive dyscontrol and impulsivity. Contextual factors, particularly those relating to relationships, supports and involvement with pro-social activities were included in the final violent offence process model. Important stressors included abuse, neglect, relationship breakdowns and difficulties, neurological deficits, substance abuse, bullying, and employment and financial pressures.

General Conclusions

The final Violent Offence Process Model provides a qualitative explanation of the numerous different pathways or trajectories possible in the commission of a violent offence by an acquitted mentally ill offender. With further quantitative analysis of the findings, this model may be used to guide interviews with mentally ill

offenders to understand the unique pathways that culminate in any given offence and therefore predict future patterns of offending. This allows for the development of interventions and treatments that specifically target individuals' unique offence processes.