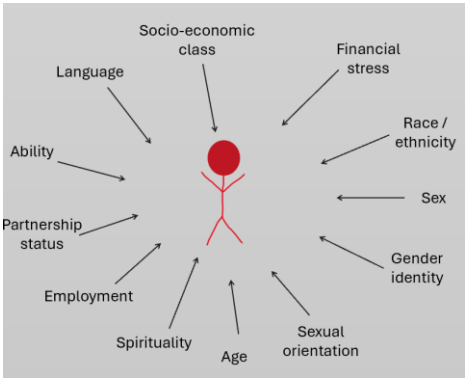
Understanding poly-victimisation through an intersectional lens

Policy brief



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Some people face a higher risk of multiple forms of victimisation

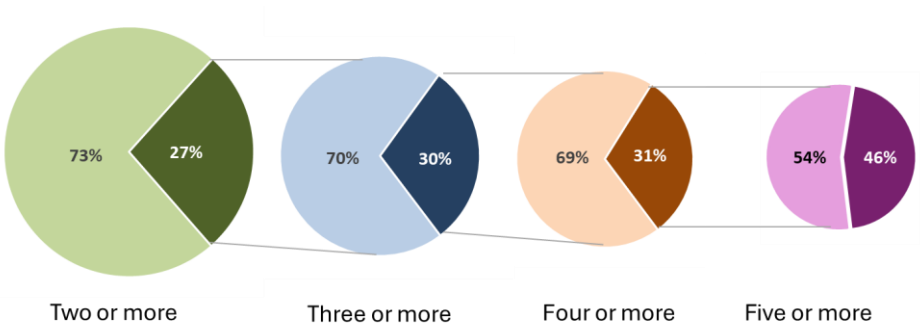
While only 15% of people in the New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey (NZCVS) experienced poly-victimisation—that is, re-victimisation involving different types of crime—this group experienced three-quarters of all reported crime incidents. Thus, 75% of crime is concentrated in 15% of the (surveyed) population. Despite this high concentration of victimisation risk, little is known about what makes some people more vulnerable to poly-victimisation than others. Enhanced understanding of who these people are is crucial for developing contemporary victim-centred crime prevention policy.

We analysed five NZCVS cycles to identify intersecting personal characteristics associated with high rates of poly-victimisation and pinpoint individual victim characteristics of particular significance. In our study, poly-victimisation was defined as experiencing more than one type of crime in the previous 12 months, meaning we used a conservative estimate of poly-victimisation during a limited data period. The findings are relevant for policymakers developing victimisation prevention programmes across Aotearoa New Zealand.

The high risk of poly-victimisation stresses the need to reduce risk after the first incident to prevent further victimisation

Once a person has been victimised (24% of NZCVS population), there is a 27% chance they will experience another type of crime within 12 months (Figure 1). The risk of experiencing re-victimisation remains high over subsequent victimisation experiences, with a sharp increase in risk (46%) for people who have experienced four prior victimisations in the previous year. This finding stresses the importance of reducing risk at the earliest opportunity to prevent further victimisation. Whilst not easy in practice, reducing re-victimisation among people who are disproportionately victimised would substantially reduce crime and associated harms. Such a prevention focus could reduce up to 86.7% of crime for poly-victims.

Figure 1. Chance of being re-victimised, based on previous victimisation experience. N.B. dark colours indicate proportion re-victimised.



Understanding poly-victimization requires recognising the role of intersectionality in shaping risk

Table 1 shows the combinations of characteristics with the largest proportion of poly-victims. For example, 100% of people who were victimised at least once *and* who were mid-aged, single, European women, bisexual, not disabled, and experiencing financial stress and moderate-high psychological distress, experienced at least one other type of crime in the survey period.

Over-represented groups with the highest rates of poly-victimisation—based on their prevalence in the survey—included people who were: mid-aged, Māori, disabled, experiencing financial

stress, women, single, with moderate to high psychological distress and/or bisexual. The prevalence of single women, likely including single mothers, highlights their vulnerability to various forms of victimisation.

Table 1. The top 10 combinations of characteristics with the highest proportion of poly-victims

Age	Ethnicities	Disability	Financial stress	Gender	Has a partner	Psychological distress	Sexual identity	n in group	% poly-victims
25-64	European	No	Yes	Woman	No	Moderate-high	Bisexual	9	100.0
25-64	European	Yes	Yes	Woman	No	Moderate-high	Heterosexual	18	83.3
25-64	European	No	Yes	Man	Yes	Moderate-high	Heterosexual	27	77.8
Under 25	Māori	No	Yes	Woman	No	Moderate-high	Heterosexual	12	75.0
25-64	European & Māori	No	Yes	Woman	No	Moderate-high	Heterosexual	36	75.0
25-64	Māori	No	Yes	Man	No	Moderate-high	Heterosexual	12	75.0
Under 25	Māori	No	No	Woman	Yes	Moderate-high	Heterosexual	12	75.0
Under 25	European	No	Yes	Woman	Yes	Moderate-high	Heterosexual	12	75.0
25-64	Māori	No	Yes	Woman	No	Moderate-high	Heterosexual	54	72.2
25-64	Māori	No	No	Woman	No	Moderate-high	Heterosexual	42	71.4

Further analysis examining each individual characteristic, while controlling for the effect of all other characteristics, found that only a few were statistically noteworthy. Being bisexual or same-sex attracted, and experiencing moderate-high psychological distress were associated with an increased risk of poly-victimisation, while being heterosexual or over 65 years were associated with decreased risk of poly-victimisation. Overall, few noteworthy individual characteristics suggests that understanding poly-victimisation requires considering the complex interplay of multiple characteristics, rather than focusing on characteristics in isolation.

The people most at risk of poly-victimisation require a multi-agency policy response to identify and address their complex needs

These findings indicate that people who are at higher risk of poly-victimisation have complex needs. A more nuanced understanding of how characteristics intersect to increase risk can help service providers and policymakers reach and protect crime victims. We recommend early identification of people at risk of becoming poly-victims through a multi-agency approach, using targeted support to reduce vulnerability to re-victimisation. Screening questions at services like victim support, primary health care providers, ACC, services for the rainbow community, and services for parents and families, and schools could help identify both poly-victims in need of support and people who are at risk of becoming poly-victims. Since we found that psychological distress was consistently associated with increased poly-victimisation risk, offering psychological support to victims of crime is crucial, where possible.

More research is needed to fill many knowledge gaps

To better protect people at high risk of poly-victimisation, future research must fill key knowledge gaps identified in our study. Personal characteristics are just one part of understanding vulnerability. Evidence suggests lifestyle factors also play a causal role in victimisation, which may extend to poly-victimisation. Interviewing poly-victims from past NZCVS cycles could provide insight into the circumstances at the time of their victimisation experiences and what agencies they seek help from, helping to optimally align resources with areas of need. Further analysis of NZCVS data could also explore what combinations of crime types poly-victims tend to experience and, by linking to other state-collected data, investigate whether psychological distress precedes or follows victimisation, helping to clarify how and why psychological distress is associated with increased risk.