



VOLATILE SUBSTANCE ABUSE



and CRIME



A study into the
association between
VSA and criminal behaviour

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Re-Solv

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Contents

- Introduction
- Published Research
- Evidence Worldwide
- Association between VSA and illegal drug use
- Press cutting analysis
- Conclusion
- Appendix - a summary of some court cases
- References

Introduction

This brief paper outlines the existing evidence of the association between volatile substance abuse (VSA) and criminal behaviour.

There are many published papers about the association between illegal drugs and criminal behaviour¹.

Much drug related criminal behaviour results from the various provisions under Misuse of Drugs Act including possession and supply. There are also crimes related to importing of substances. These categories have no parallel with crimes associated with volatile substance abuse, apart from supply, which is an offence in certain specific circumstances.

The *Updated Drugs Strategy 2002* places most emphasis on crimes committed in relation to raising the funds to purchase illegal drugs. Much of the emphasis of this strategy is on providing interventions as people come into contact with the Justice System. There are relatively few crimes associated with the acquisition of volatile substances due to the ease of accessibility, even where funds are not available.

There are further drugs related crimes that are directly induced by drug taking. This category of crime has most parallels with reported crimes associated with volatile substance abuse. There are a significant number of crimes associated with behaviour while intoxicated with volatile substances.

The link between substance abuse and crime may not be direct. Another area of concern, research and debate is whether substance use acts as a precursor to later criminal behaviour.

There is little research within the UK about the association between volatile substance abuse and criminal behaviour. This paper is a brief review of published reports. As this information is limited we have also included information from press reports of court proceedings. While these are indirect, reported sources and may include hearsay and possible exaggeration, the quantity and content of the reports provide strong evidence of an association between volatile substances and crime.

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Published research

A report in the *Journal of Adolescence* in 1983² highlighted a concern over an increasing number of teenage boys being admitted to secure facilities with a background of solvent abuse. The report made strong associations between sniffing and delinquent behaviour.

In 1999 Re-Solv undertook a survey within Werrington Young Offenders Institute (YOI) on behalf of the HM Inspector of Prisons³. The survey found that 42% of the sample had used volatile substances. 30% were aware of volatile substance abuse within the YOI particularly with regard to petrol. Discussions with the staff revealed that there had been a serious VSA related incident in the month prior to the survey. The survey was followed by recommendations to improve screening and staff training.

There are a number of reports that highlight an increased frequency of drug misuse of vulnerable young people⁴. The Home Office report *At the margins*⁵ highlights that VSA is particularly prevalent amongst vulnerable young people. In particular, 26% of serious persistent offenders had used volatile substances, and 19% of lifetime minor offenders. The study also found particularly strong associations with young people who were truant or excluded from school as well as homeless rough sleepers.

ASSET⁶ was introduced in 2000 as a common structured assessment profile across the youth justice system in England and Wales. Analysis of the assessments showed that 12% of young offenders admitted to having used solvents. This compares with 13% who admitted to using a Class A drug, the most common of which was Ecstasy which 10% reported using. Amongst young offenders completing pre-sentence reports, 18% had used volatile substances compared with 20% having used Class A drugs.

The Home Office study *A Road to Ruin*⁷ looked at the chronology of offending and drug using behaviour. This is important evidence in establishing whether drugs can be a gateway into criminal behaviour. The study found that criminal behaviour tended to precede drug use. The average age for onset of crime was 14.5 years compared with 16.2 years for drugs generally and 19.9 years for hard drugs. The average of onset for volatile substance abuse was 14.1 years, i.e. just preceding the onset of criminal behaviour, suggesting that it could be a gateway into criminal behaviour.



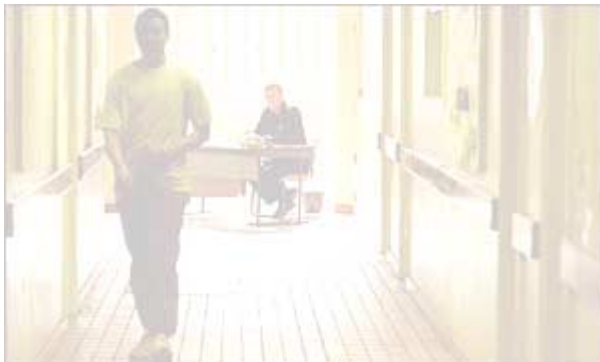
Evidence worldwide

A study⁸ of 475 youths on probation in a western state of the United States found that “inhalant-using delinquents evidence significantly greater antisocial attitudes, personal and familial dysfunction, and substance abuse, than do their non-inhalant using counterparts.”

A US study published in *Addiction*⁹ in 1999 looked at the association between inhalant use and delinquent behaviour. The study surveyed 13,000 students in grades 7-12 and found that within grades 9-12 students that used inhalants or experimented with inhalants reported more minor criminal activity than the students who used alcohol or drugs or who experimented with these substances.

The report concluded that inhalant use was categorically different from other drug use and that it had more in common with general delinquency than with general drug use.

Other studies^{10,11} have found similar results reporting higher frequency of crimes with inhalant users than illegal drugs.



The association between volatile substance abuse and illegal drug use

A study of social and psychological factors underlying inhalant abuse¹² found that there was a higher average level of emotional problems amongst inhalant users although these were not identical. The study suggests a route by which inhalant users move to using illegal drugs.

The study *Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England in 2003*¹⁵ found that those who had taken volatile substances by the age of 13 were over twice as likely than those who had not, to have taken Class A drugs in the last year. (16% compared with 7% respectively.)

An American study *Relationship of early inhalant use to substance use in college students*¹³ found that early use of inhalants conferred a greater risk than early use of marijuana to subsequent frequent drinking, binge drinking, smoking, illicit drug use and substance-related consequences during college years.

A further study¹⁴ analysed longitudinal data of 600 subjects who had participated in adolescent and adult assessments (aged 16 and 32 respectively). The study found that youths with a history of inhalant use by the age of 16 were over nine times more likely to begin heroin use by the age of 32.

Press cutting analysis

Re-Solv has collected all press cuttings reporting volatile substance abuse over many years and has a unique and continuous record. There are hundreds of reports of VSA related incidents such as vandalism etc, however in these reports it is impossible to substantiate the association with VSA, as the press reports are prone to exaggeration and hearsay. The court reports however provide one source of information that it is possible to substantiate and are believed to be broadly accurate. From an analysis of the press cuttings received at Re-Solv the following information can be gained.

Re-Solv has press reports of over 674 individual court cases where VSA is mentioned within the context of the behaviour of the defendant or defendants over a period of 9 years. The list includes 26 prosecutions for murder. Appendix 1 is a list of several cases from the year prior to January 2005. This is a selection from a total of 53 individual court cases during this period. These reports highlight that there is a wide diversity of incidents and a high proportion of very serious offences including rape and murder (see report 1 attempted murder, reports 6, 8, 17 serious attacks on police officers, report 10 murder, report 11 arson, report 16 unlawful wounding, report 18 manslaughter, report 19 aggravated burglary, report 21 rape). This may suggest that this reporting is only the tip of the iceberg, as "less interesting" cases will receive less press attention. Alternatively it may suggest that volatile substances have a marked impact upon behaviour.

There are also a significant number of repeat offenders (See report 7, four robberies; report 9 persistent bad behaviour; report 14 received 77 ASBO reports; report 15 had committed 76 offences and report 22 was believed to be responsible for 50 crimes). With the introduction of ASBOs this repeat behaviour has become more apparent.

Conclusion

The survey by the Department of Health, *Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England in 2003*¹⁵ found that 8% had used solvents within the last year. This compares with 7% in 2001 and 6% in 2002. Their analysis shows that use of volatile substances was highest amongst 13 and 14 year olds. Below the age of 14 young people more commonly use volatile substances than any other drug including cannabis.

The various survey evidence suggests that there is a higher frequency of volatile substance abuse amongst known young offenders as well as those groups who are more vulnerable to offending, than amongst the wider population. They also show that young people start using volatile substances at about the same time that they start to get involved in crime.

Studies from the United States provide stronger evidence of an association with “delinquent” behaviour. There are also reports, which suggest that young people who use volatile substances are more likely to go on to use illegal substances.

The content of the court cases reported in the press suggest however that there is a significant amount of crime committed while young people have been using solvents. Many of the reported crimes are serious offences. The circumstances of many of these reports suggest that the crimes would not have been committed if volatile substances had not been a factor.

The surveys show that VSA is a part of young people's lives at the point at which they are starting to commit crimes. In many cases use of volatile substances will stop quite quickly, whereas criminal behaviour is more likely to continue. Therefore by the time young people are in contact with the youth justice system they may no longer be using volatile substances.

The press reports provide some evidence that may be, in some cases, a causal link between volatile substance abuse and crime.

The association between volatile substance abuse and early criminal behaviour does warrant much further investigation, as does the association with later drug using behaviour. Volatile substance abuse may have a much greater impact upon behaviour than is readily apparent from sources of data such as admissions to arrest referral schemes, treatment services etc. Understanding this relationship may provide opportunities for preventing the onset of criminal behaviour as well illegal drug use.

Appendix

A summary of a small selection of VSA related court cases reported in the UK press during 2004/5

1. Shelly Farr, a 16-year-old female from Gwent, was charged with attempted murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. She stabbed a 14-year-old girl 20 times at a Blaina Funfair. She was given a 15-year custodial sentence for attempted murder and 5 years for conspiring to wound. She pleaded not guilty to the charges. The judge told her: "You should not be released until there is no risk of danger to others". She must serve a minimum of 4 years and 3 months before release is considered. Farr and a 13 year old girl had "hatched a bizarre plan" to seriously injure someone at the fair. Before the attack, Farr drank a litre of neat vodka and she sniffed glue. They found their victim, and Farr used her four-inch knife "again and again". The victim had stab wounds to the top of her head, throat, neck and the side of her arm. She is scarred and may need cosmetic surgery. She spent 2 days in intensive care after suffering a collapsed lung. Farr's 13-year-old accomplice, who cannot be named for legal reasons, was given a 2-year supervision order. She will be electronically tagged for 90 days and a curfew was set between 6 am and 7 pm. Farr has never told anyone why she carried out the attack.
2. Ellen Moore, a 13-year-old female from Leeds, was given an Anti Social Behaviour Order. She was reportedly leader of a gang of 50, called Leeds Town Crew. She ran amok, while high on glue, with her gang. They threatened and abused shoppers, workers, residents and police. They shouted abuse at security guards and the police. They threatened people with violence and spat at them. They harassed and abused passengers on buses. The gang were behind a series of mobile 'phone thefts and violent assaults. She is banned from entering Leeds City Centre, or taking a bus anywhere in the city, unless accompanied by a parent or guardian. She is banned from pulling a hooded top or scarf over her head to hide her identity. Also, she is barred from contact with any other member of the gang. The order forbids her to repeat her "reckless behaviour" anywhere in West Yorkshire. She is banned from using glue, solvents or any drugs in a public place. The girl laughed as details of the five-year order were read out. Bans have also been imposed on almost 20 other gang members.
3. Phillip Martin, a 34 year old man from Northern Ireland, carried out a burglary moments after leaving a police station. He left his coat, containing a charge sheet with his name and address on it, at the scene of the crime. He had broken into a warehouse, in Ballymena, shortly after coming out of a nearby police station, where he was dealt with for an earlier theft offence. Police saw Martin going into Parkhead Service Station. He put a tin of Dampstart, worth £2.89, down the back of his trousers. He was stopped by police and taken to the police station. Police investigating a subsequent burglary, at Stephen Brown Kitchens, found a grey coloured coat at the scene. Inside was a copy of a police charge sheet. A radio valued at £30 and clothing worth £80 were stolen from the kitchen warehouse. The Defence Solicitor said that glue was the major common denominator in Martin's offending. He was given a 10 month suspended prison term.

4. David Ward a 21-year-old male from Stockton was sentenced to 2½ years in prison after he pleaded guilty to possession of an imitation weapon. A postman was delivering the post in Stockton, when Ward chased him and pointed a plastic gun in his face. The postman, who believed the weapon was real, was terrified and had to run and hide to evade his attacker. Daniel Ward had not been taking the medication for his condition and was high on lighter fuel at the time and began hallucinating and thought the postman was a burglar. Only when the postman hid behind a parked car did Ward give up and go home.
5. William Gallagher, a 33-year-old male, was sentenced to life imprisonment after he pleaded guilty to robbery of £240 from a Kentucky Chicken outlet while on glue. He appealed against the life sentence and Lord Chief Justice Sir Brian Kerr quashed it. However, he said that a severe penalty had to be imposed to reflect the seriousness of the offence and sentenced Gallagher to nine years in prison. Gallagher was described as a very dangerous and violent man.
6. Andrew Gill a 25-year-old male from St Peter Port admitted to a glue problem. He was in court after he threatened to blow a policeman's head off with a gun before biting the kerb. He claimed he had been run over by a cyclist and shouted racial abuse at a female passer-by. He swore at the policeman and threatened him. He told the policeman, "If you want me to eat concrete, I will" and began biting the kerb. He was given a 12-month probation order on the condition that he receives treatment and keeps in contact with the residential drug worker. He was ordered to pay £9 compensation for the broken pane of glass.
7. Dale Chilton, a 21-year-old male from Cannock pleaded guilty to four robberies and possessing offensive weapons – a crowbar, a knife and a screwdriver. He stole almost £30,000 in cash and mobile phone top up cards worth £800, when he broke into a Spar supermarket in June 03. In July '03 Chilton and another man robbed the Crown Public House in Brownhills at 3.30 a.m. He has sniffed gas since he was 12 and currently uses gas. He also has a drug problem and is on Prozac. He was jailed for five years.
8. Brian Williamson, a 30-year-old male from Durham was jailed for six years after a policeman feared he was going to be killed. Williamson, high on a mixture of lighter fuel and drink, repeatedly tried to stab him with a kitchen knife. The PC only escaped serious injury because of his protective vest and helmet, which shielded him from the blows. Williamson also sprayed ignited lighter fuel over the PC and two female colleagues. He also threw household objects at them, including an iron, ironing board and typewriter. Eventually he gave himself up.
9. Four teenagers aged between 13 and 17 were given Anti Social Behaviour Orders after terrorising shoppers and passengers at Mansfield bus station. They have been banned from the town centre. They have caused misery for shoppers, retailers and bus station users through their persistent bad behaviour. Allegations were also made of shoplifting, street robbery and criminal damage. The order also prohibits them from taking part in solvent abuse, being present during "drug deals" using the bus station, wearing clothing which hides their identity and associating with each other and other named individuals in public.

10. Jason Ward a 23 year old male from Mansfield, beat and murdered an 87-year-old pensioner, fractured her jaw and skull, broke her neck, split her ear, and fractured six of her ribs. There were also cuts to her face. She had been strangled and clumps of her hair were pulled from her head. She had also been raped and had internal injuries. A neighbour discovered her the following day. Ward had sought help for anxiety and hallucinations in 1998. This was thought to be connected to drug abuse as he took cannabis and sniffed aerosols. He was given a minimum jail sentence of 22 years.
11. Lawrence Bishop a 37 year old male from Cardiff, set fire to his flat where a mother and four small children were at home. When fire fighters arrived, he wouldn't let them in. They could see him in the living room with a cigarette lighter in one hand and a knife in the other. He was trying to set fire to clothes piled up in the middle of the floor. He was addicted to sniffing solvents and containers of glue were found near the fire. He was jailed for four years after admitting committing arson while being reckless as to whether lives would be endangered
12. Phillip Whitehead a 37-year-old male from Derby was banned from entering an estate in Derby. He was regularly seen on the Austin Estate abusing solvents in public places, including outside parks, and was also seen approaching people and behaving in a threatening manner. The order will last for two years. Whitehead will face prison if he breaches the order by entering the Austin Estate, or if he is found in possession or under the influence of solvents.
13. George Carter, a 35-year-old male, was driving on the A29 from Five Oaks. He crossed the southbound carriageway and crashed through a hedge. His passenger was taken to hospital with minor injuries. Police noticed his breath smelled of solvents and his speech was slurred. They found a plastic bag containing solvents in the car. A blood test showed he had been inhaling toluene and acetone. The car has been written off. Carter has been a solvent abuser for 8- 9 years. He admitted driving while unfit through drugs. He also admitted breach of a conditional discharge for theft imposed in January 2004. He was banned from driving for four years and fined £70 with £43 costs. He revoked the conditional discharge and imposed another one, lasting one year.
14. Brian Stilling, a 37-year-old male was given an Antisocial Behaviour Order following 77 ASBO reports received by Police. He was given the ban for persistently inhaling solvents in full view of his neighbours and offering his glue to children as they passed by after leaving school.
15. Craig Lennox a 31-year-old male from Newton Abbott launched a brutal attack on a barman walking near him after going to an all night garage to buy some lighter fuel to sniff. He punched his face causing cuts, which needed stitches. Police had to use a dog to arrest him. He was released on bail but soon after he took exception to a noisy tumble dryer and ripped an intercom unit off the wall and smashed the machine glass. He then attacked the support worker who tried to calm him down. He knocked him over, grabbed him round the throat, punched him and threw him over a banister on to the floor eight feet below. He has committed 76 offences. He was jailed for 3 ½ years.

16. A 17-year-old male from Carlisle stabbed another youth with a kitchen knife, while high on lighter fuel and alcohol, on New Year's Eve. The victim had four stab wounds in his back and a slash on his throat, which was so deep that doctors said it could have killed him. The teenager pleaded guilty to a charge of unlawful wounding. He was sent to detention for 18 months on top of six months in custody he had already spent on remand.
17. Darren Smith a 29-year-old male from Corby attacked a police officer with a metal pole when he went to arrest him for an attack on his mother. He admitted attempted wounding and possession of cannabis. Smith has been sniffing glue. He was jailed for 21 months. Smith's representative said: "He seems to have had a fairly useless life and as a way of distancing himself he takes glue which rather likely have played a significant part in the way he behaved".
18. Chantelle Dunkerly, a 15 year old female from Manchester, while high on aerosol fumes, killed her friend Ryan Hilton, age 13 by dousing him with petrol and flicking a cigarette lighter near his face as a prank. Ryan was so badly burned that he died a few hours later. Dunkerly and Ryan Hilton had stolen a petrol can and the lighter fuel from a car and then they bought two cans of deodorant. Ryan began to sniff the petrol while Chantelle and another boy sniffed the deodorants. Chantelle pleaded guilty to manslaughter. She was sentenced to three years and three months' detention. She has also been given a five year Anti-Social Behaviour Order.
19. Stephen Patrick Burns, a 19-year-old male from Belfast, was high on glue when he terrorised a pensioner in her own home. A baton wielding Burns in her North Belfast home demanding the keys of her car confronted the 78-year-old pensioner. The woman handed over £23 to Burns, who left. He returned moments later with a second man and this time she gave them the keys of her car. Burns pleaded guilty to aggravated burglary and also admitted attempting to burgle another Belfast house in February 2004. He was jailed for five years.
20. Robert Bailey, a 16-year-old male from Nuneaton, raped a 12-year-old girl after sniffing nail varnish to celebrate being let out on bail for burglary. He had been bailed the previous day for a series of burglaries in July and August. He attacked the girl as she walked home from school. He grabbed her around the waist and dragged her into a muddy field. He threatened to kill her if she told anyone. He admitted stealing the nail varnish in Nuneaton and sniffing it in Weddington Fields. He also drank cider and smoked cannabis. He used violence on the girl and punched her repeatedly in the face. He was sentenced to five years for rape and a year for four burglaries and one attempted burglary.
21. Brian Tatlor, 36, has an addiction to petrol and was banned from every Asda store after being caught cutting fuel pipes; he was also banned from going within 15 metres of any filling station on Teeside. Supermarket CCTV footage caught him in the act and police believe he could have been responsible for around 50 incidents in the last two years. Police said, "The major concern is that when he has been cutting the pipe, customers have not noticed the cut and some have been soaked in petrol."

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About Re-Solv

Re-Solv's mission is to contribute to happier, healthier, safer social environments by preventing death, suffering and crime which may result as a consequence of solvent and volatile substance abuse (VSA.)

We are calling for:

- Prevention of solvent and volatile substance abuse to be placed high on the national and international agenda
- Clear educational messages to ensure that products are used for their intended purpose
- Better services and provisions for users, especially young people and their families.

We do this through research, dissemination of educational materials, training and community projects.

With over twenty years experience and dedication to the prevention of VSA, Re-Solv is acknowledged as the lead body in the field and recognised as a specialist source of information on VSA.

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