

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of an Empathy  
Training Module for Child Sex Offenders

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Arts  
in  
Psychology  
at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand

Tracy Vannessa Smith  
2006

## **Abstract**

The aim of the current study was to evaluate the effectiveness of an empathy training module for treatment of child sexual offenders incarcerated at a New Zealand Special Treatment Unit. Twenty-eight participants volunteered for the study which involved three time conditions; pre-intervention, post-intervention and three-month follow-up. Three measures were used to assess generalised empathy and victim-specific empathy in this sample. No significant results were found, although preliminary data did suggest that this sample may differ from previous studies on the victim-specific measure. Namely, contrary to previous research the sample demonstrated the greatest empathy deficit for the child accident victim, rather than their own victims. The current study had a number of limitations, including methodological errors that make the generalisation of results unfeasible.

## Acknowledgements

Firstly, thanks to my wonderful husband, James, for all your support, patience and devotion during the ups and downs of this research, including putting our wedding on hold until the project was complete. Thanks also to my mother for the ongoing support and encouragement to embark on this degree and keep going despite the many hurdles. You have both been my strength throughout this project and I appreciate all you have done to ensure that I am able to succeed with this study. Thanks also to my extended family and friends who supported me and showed an interest in my research, including the lively debates which I so enjoyed. Also, a special thanks to my niece, Becky and good friend, Sinnetta for your patience with proof-reading my work, guidance from your own experiences with writing theses and being there for me when things got tough to reassure me that it is 'normal'.

Thank you to my supervisor, Mei Williams, for your enthusiasm and guidance with this research.

Thank you to the New Zealand Department of Corrections who supported this research and allowed it to happen. In particular, to Jim, Manager at the Special Treatment Unit for all your assistance and support, and Ellen, Senior Practitioner for your guidance, scholarly discussions and great sense of humour. You have both been a terrific help and inspiration.

Finally, a special thanks to the participants of this research, without which this project would not be possible. Your willingness to give up your time and personal insights for the benefit of this research has been much appreciated.

## Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	.....	ii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	.....	iii
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	.....	iv
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	.....	vi
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	.....	1
Defining empathy	.....	2
Research on empathy	.....	9
Models of empathy	.....	11
Empathy and offending	.....	14
Measurement of empathy	.....	18
Empathy measurement with sex offenders	.....	25
Training and treatment of empathy	.....	27
Sex offender treatment efficacy research	.....	29
Aims of the research	.....	31
Hypotheses	.....	33
<b>METHOD</b>	.....	35
Research design	.....	35
Treatment programme	.....	35
Participants	.....	36
Materials	.....	38
Procedure	.....	43
<b>RESULTS</b>	.....	46
Data screening	.....	46
Reliability	.....	48
Assessment for normality	.....	48
Hypothesis testing	.....	51
Summary of findings	.....	60

<b>DISCUSSION</b>	.....	62
Hypothesis One	.....	62
Hypothesis Two	.....	66
Hypothesis Three	.....	69
Hypothesis Four	.....	71
Limitations of this study	.....	72
Future research	.....	76
Conclusion	.....	77
<b>REFERENCES</b>	.....	78
<b>APPENDIX A</b>	Participant Information Sheet .....	90
<b>APPENDIX B</b>	Participant Consent Form .....	91
<b>APPENDIX C</b>	Questionnaires .....	92

## List of Tables

TABLE 1 -	Frequencies and Percentages of the Demographic Variables Relationship Status, Educational Level and Previous Offences .....	38
TABLE 2 -	Missing Data Analysis for the Scales Used in the Present Study .....	47
TABLE 3 -	Tests for Normality of the Scales Used in the Present Study .....	49
TABLE 4 -	Relationship Between Scales Used in the Present Study ..	50
TABLE 5 -	Descriptive Statistics for the Scales and Subscales Used in the Present Study .....	51
TABLE 6 -	Comparison of the Mean Total Scores on the EQ and IRI found in the Present Study with Scores from Previous Studies .....	53
TABLE 7 -	Comparison of the Subscale Scores on the IRI found in the Present Study with Scores from Previous Studies .....	54
TABLE 8 -	Analysis of Differences Between Mean Scores on the IRI Subscales from Pre-Intervention to Post-Intervention and Post-Intervention to Follow-Up .....	57
TABLE 9 -	Comparison of the Mean Total Scores on the CMEM Found in the Present Study with Scores from Previous Studies .....	60