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**CAUSAL ATTRIBUTIONS FOR CRIMINAL
OFFENDING AND SEXUAL AROUSAL OF
FOUR CATEGORIES OF OFFENDERS**

A Thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology
at Massey University

Meryl Margaret McKay-Lawes

1992



This thesis is dedicated to Margaret McKay - a Scottish jewel

**WHA'S LIKE US
DAMN FEW AND THEY'RE A'DEID**

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McK

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ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been an increase in reported crime in New Zealand, and also an increase in public concern about the levels of crime, particularly violent and sexual crimes. The justice system, while imposing more severe penalties for some crimes, is particularly interested in instituting and expanding rehabilitative and social interventions. In that context, a fuller understanding of the causes of crime, and hence the identification of appropriate strategies to reduce crime and recidivism, is imperative.

The present research investigated the causal attributions offered by male prison inmates for their offending, and also their causal attributions for their sexual arousal and sexual behaviour. In addition, prison inmates' own perceptions of their personal characteristics and life experiences, and how these cognitions contributed to the initiation of their criminal offending was also studied.

Prison inmates who had been convicted of an offence in one of four crime categories were selected from seven prisons in New Zealand. The types of offence studied were child sex offences (children under 16 years), rape (unlawful sexual connection), offences against property, and violent offences against persons. Only offenders' own reasons for their current convictions were assessed, and the focus of this study was the child sex offenders, and their responses were analysed in comparison with those of the three other offender groups.

In semi-structured clinical interviews, specially developed instruments (Offence and Sexual Arousal Questionnaires) were administered. The offenders categorised into attributional dimensions both the causes of their offending behaviour, and the causes of their sexual arousal, and of their sexual behaviour. An Individual Response Inventory which included Social Desirability, Sexual Repression, and Lack of Control of Sexual Behaviour scales was administered.

A survey of inmates' basic sexual knowledge was also carried out by questionnaire. This scale assessed the offender's knowledge of their own sexuality, and also of female sexuality.

Results presented in this study endorse the importance of individual assessments of offenders in order to identify their causal attributions, and thereby the motivation behind their offending. This study provides support for the view that researchers do not necessarily perceive causes as varying along the same dimensions as the person offering the causes, and this may lead to researchers making misleading interpretations of offenders' cognitions.

Child sex offenders were differentiated from the other groups by the causes they offered, and the dimensions to which they attributed both their offence behaviour and their sexual arousal. Child sex offenders attributed causes for both their offending and their sexual arousal to **internal, stable, and uncontrollable** dimensions. Rapists and property offenders attributed their offending behaviour to **external, unstable, controllable** dimensions, and violent offenders to **internal, stable, and uncontrollable** dimensions. In contrast to child sex offenders, the other three groups all attributed their sexual arousal and sexual behaviour to **external, unstable, and controllable** dimensions. Child sex offenders scored lower on the Basic Sexual Knowledge scale, repressed their sexuality more, and reported different sexual fantasies from the other offender groups. Emotional issues featured prominently for all offender groups as causes of their offending. Many offenders in the child sex and violent offender groups viewed these causes as being personal problems, and the offending appeared to be a way of temporarily resolving the problem. In contrast, property offenders and rapists saw their offending as a way of obtaining a pleasurable emotional experience.

Child sex offenders frequently viewed internal urges and forces, or children's immature bodies, as the causes of their sexual arousal. This contrasted with all other offender groups' causal attributions.

The findings were discussed in terms of their implications in intervention programmes. The results support a new dimension to psychological intervention with criminal offenders, and demonstrate the importance of assessing and addressing offender's own attributions as part of their rehabilitation programmes.

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