

Spring 4-9-2019

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Offender Characteristics: Influence on Attitudes and Sentencing Patterns of Female

Undergraduates

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Honours Psychology Thesis
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April 2019

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Abstract

Offender rehabilitation has more positive outcomes, yet the public prefers the punishment of incarceration. Disparity in the punitivity of sentencing has been related to age and gender of offenders, with adult, male offenders receiving more punitive, less rehabilitative sentences than youth, female offenders. The present study examined patterns of sentencing in an all female sample ($N=103$). After reading a crime story manipulating offender gender and age, participants were asked to “sentence” the offender. Gender of offender did not cause differences in sentences given, however youth offenders were sentenced significantly less. Participants showed no significant attitudinal differences on the Treatment Attitude Scale (TAS) related to the gender or age of the fictional offender. Furthermore, there were no significant differences in punitivity or attitude between participants in the experimental groups and control group. These results indicate that sentencing disparity based on offender gender or age may not be prevalent in all populations.

Offender Characteristics: Influence on Attitudes and Sentencing Patterns of Female Undergraduates

Canadian prisons and jails are often perceived to be ineffective at preventing crime and reducing recidivism (Gendreau, Goggin, & Cullen, 1999). Reducing recidivism—the rate of criminal reoffending—has been seen as an important goal of criminal sentencing, as it reduces the risk that offenders pose to the public (Adams, Dasko, Lennon, Aaron, & Armstrong, 2015). Research has indicated that incarceration, such as confinement in a prison, jail, or penitentiary, may not be the best method to reduce reoffending. The process of incarceration is not only economically inefficient, it is also an ineffective means of reducing rates of recidivism (Marsh & Fox, 2008). In fact, Gendreau et al. (1999) found that going to prison actually increased recidivism rates for both high-risk (high risk of causing harm) and low-risk (low risk of causing harm) offenders. The length of time an offender spent incarcerated was positively associated with recidivism rates (Gendreau et al. 1999). Therefore, incarceration, whether through federal prison or provincial jail, is not effective at producing the desired outcome of reductions in crime and reoffending.

According to Andrews and Bonta (2010), the current Canadian criminal justice system is ineffective at reducing recidivism because it has incorrectly utilized the concept of punishment in criminal sentencing. Punishment has traditionally been used as a means to deter crime. The idea of deterrence was that people would not engage in criminal behaviours in order to avoid punishment, such as incarceration. It has been argued that for punishment to be effective at deterring crime and reducing reoffending, it must be at maximum intensity, must be immediate, and must be consistently applied

(Andrews & Bonta, 2010). In Canada, most crimes do not result in a maximum sentence and court processes significantly delay punishment, therefore, weakening the effects of punishment. Furthermore, offenders are often not punished for most of the crimes they commit, which results in their criminal behaviour being rewarded (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Because Canada's criminal justice system has not implemented sufficiently effective forms of punishment, alternative ways to reduce recidivism have been explored.

Compared to incarceration, rehabilitative treatments and community programs have appeared to be more effective methods of reducing recidivism rates (Marsh & Fox, 2008; Warner & Kramer, 2009). Marsh and Fox (2008) demonstrated that rehabilitative interventions for offenders, such as residential drug treatment, were associated with reductions in reoffending compared to prison sentences. Furthermore, Warner and Kramer (2009) found that offenders in a treatment program showed a lower risk of being arrested for reoffending compared to offenders that were sent to jail. Rehabilitation and treatment programs with a cognitive-behavioural basis demonstrated reductions in recidivism also (Tong & Farrington, 2006; Mpofu, Athanasou, Rafe, & Belshaw, 2018). Tong and Farrington (2006) reported that the Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R) program, a skills-based program teaching various cognitive and behavioural techniques, showed potential for rehabilitative efforts in Canada. Such rehabilitation programs have benefited a wide range of offenders, including volunteers, offenders mandated to participate as part of their criminal sentence, violent offenders, and sex offenders, with reductions in both violent and general recidivism for all groups (Mpofu et al., 2018).

Rehabilitation is especially effective when the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model is considered (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). According to the RNR model, the most effective intervention can: predict recidivism and provide appropriate levels of treatment based on an offender's crime (risk); target rehabilitative services to offenders' risk factors (need); and utilize effective, offender-specific modes of treatment delivery (responsivity). Rehabilitation programs, especially those that properly take the risk factors, needs, and appropriate methods for treatment of the offender into consideration, have been shown to be best for reducing reoffence and increasing public safety (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Yet, there are barriers to making such programs a common practice in the Canadian criminal justice system.

For instance, despite the efficacious results of offender rehabilitation, the public is unaware, and often unaccepting, of this alternative to criminal sentencing (Adams et al., 2015). In a study of the views of the Canadian public, Adams et al. (2015) discovered that participants believed that most offenders were beyond the ability to be rehabilitated, despite admitting that they were unaware of the rehabilitation services available to offenders and the effectiveness of such services. Furthermore, many Canadians did not believe that rehabilitation should be the main goal of the criminal justice system. Previous research has indicated that the Canadian public has a mixture of retributive and rehabilitative views of criminal sentencing, yet most research has found that Canadians believe that the goal of sentencing should be to make sure offenders "get what they deserve" (Adams et al., 2015; Payne, Gainey, Tripplett, & Danner, 2004; Rogers, 2005).

Canadians tend to believe that the criminal justice system has been too lenient in sentencing offenders (Zamble & Kalm, 1990). There has been strong support for the increased use of prison sentences, harsher punishments, re-instating capital punishment, and harsher prison conditions (Adams et al., 2015; McCorkle, 1993; Rogers, 2005). Furthermore, many researchers and members of the public believe that rehabilitation programs do not meet the demands of the offender populations (Rogers, 2005). Canadians are found to lack faith in the ability of the Canadian criminal justice system to reduce reoffending and tend to prefer more punitive sentencing to deter crime (Adams et al., 2015). In fact, research has indicated that when given the chance to mock-sentence offenders, many participants delivered more severe punishments than would be realistically delivered in court (Zamble & Kalm, 1990).

According to Rogers (2005), the punitivity of members of the public has been attributed to various phenomena in Canada and the United States. First, individuals who adopt *just-world beliefs*—beliefs that the world is fair and just and everyone gets what they deserve—were more likely to hold punitive beliefs than those lacking just-world beliefs (Rogers, 2005). Secondly, religion has been linked to punitive sentencing (Ulmer, Bader, & Gault, 2008). Ulmer et al. (2008) found that areas in the United States with more Christian homogeneity—groups with similar people, lacking diversity—were more likely to incarcerate offenders compared to heterogeneous areas. The relationship between punitive sentencing and religion was not demonstrated with any other homogenous religious groups, however. Politics and the influence of media have also been linked to the punitive attitudes of Canadians (Rogers, 2005). Politicians and certain media outlets tend to demonize offenders and dramatize crime and crime rates.

Sensationalizing of crime in such ways creates a fear for public safety and fosters a hatred of all offenders. These depictions of offenders have created the perceived need to use more punitive sentences to keep these “dangerous” offenders separated from society and to increase public safety (Rogers, 2005). While Canadians may be generalized as having punitive attitudes about criminal sentencing, the punitivity is often reserved for specific types of offenders (Kääriäinen, 2018; Zamble & Kalm, 1990).

Differential treatment of offenders based on their age have been demonstrated in the type and severity of the sentence an offender receives (Barretto, Miers, & Lambie, 2018; Zamble & Kalm, 1990). Canadians tend to be more supportive of lenient and rehabilitative sentences for young offenders compared to adult offenders (Zamble & Kalm, 1990). In other developed countries, such as New Zealand, people are generally supportive of rehabilitation rather than punitive prison sentences for youth offenders as well (Barretto et al., 2018). Barretto et al. (2018) noted that along with the overall sentencing goal of rehabilitation for youth offenders, the public favored a focus on prevention for these offenders. Furthermore, Zamble and Kalm (1990) found that the severity of sentencing increased as the age of offender increased. Therefore, it appears that the public has more lenient attitudes and sentencing preferences toward youth offenders compared to adults.

Sentencing disparity has also been found between genders, as female offenders typically receive milder sentences than their male counterparts (Kääriäinen, 2018). In a recent Finnish study, Kääriäinen (2018) found that when reading case studies in which the offender was a woman, participants gave milder sentences. According to Rodriguez, Curry, and Lee (2006), this trend has been demonstrated in real cases of incarceration

in the United States. Men were more likely to receive a prison sentence and receive a sentence of over three years longer than women. Women received lesser sentences, regardless of crime (Rodriguez et al., 2006). However, as explained by Rodriguez et al. (2006), according to the selective chivalry thesis, women only benefit from their gender in sentencing when they have committed stereotypically “feminine” crimes, like drug offences. The selective chivalry thesis indicates that men, on the other hand, are twice as likely to be incarcerated for such “feminine” crimes (Rodriguez et al., 2006). When women commit more “masculine” crimes, such as assault and general violent crimes, they are not given more lenient sentences (Rodriguez et al., 2006). Clearly, the context of the crime and the sex of the offender matter in sentencing.

There is also an interaction between the gender and social conditions of offenders and the sentences that they receive (Kääriäinen, 2018). According to Kääriäinen (2018), offenders with known drug addictions are given harsher sentences than offenders who experienced different social hardships. A decrease in sentence severity is seen when a vignette describes an offender who faced social issues like intimate partner violence and separation from family members (Kääriäinen, 2018). However, the sentence depends on the gender of both the offender and the respondent doing the sentencing. For example, when the vignette described a violent male offender who experienced social issues, female respondents showed increased punitivity toward offenders, while male respondents showed reductions in punitivity. When the offender facing hardship was a woman, on the other hand, women respondents were less punitive (Kääriäinen, 2018). Such findings indicate that gender biases are not only

influenced by the gender of the offender being sentenced, but the gender of the individual doing the sentencing as well.

Much research on the gender differences in punitivity has indicated that women are more punitive and conviction-prone compared to men (ForsterLee, ForsterLee, Horowitz, & King, 2006). ForsterLee and colleagues (2006) suggested that this punitive nature of women comes from their general ability to sympathize more with the victim of the crime and understand the message content of the cases in more detail. Some have suggested that the increased punitivity of women is related to their fear of offenders and is for protective reasons, rather than a desire for punishment (Applegate, Cullen, & Fisher, 2002). However, additional research has indicated that women were more treatment oriented in sentencing, while men were more focused on punishment (Applegate et al., 2002). Further, Walsh (1984) reported that female probation officers showed more leniency than their male counterparts. Thus, further research is needed to explore the sentencing patterns and punitivity of women.

Despite the contradictory findings related to gender, criminal sentencing, and punitivity, research suggests that even with knowledge of the effectiveness of rehabilitation, most people in Canada still prefer punitive and retributive sentences, such as incarceration, for offenders (Adams et al., 2015). There has been an exception to this punitivity, as previously mentioned, in that the public generally tends to be lenient in sentencing women and youth (Kääriäinen, 2018; Zamble & Kalm, 1990). Such biases of gender and age can negatively impact the lives of certain offenders and the public. A lack of access to rehabilitation programs for certain types of offenders—who members of the public are biased against—can lead to such offenders being stuck in an endless

cycle of being released, reoffending, re-arrest, and being released again (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Instead of rehabilitation, these offenders can be sent to a federal prison or provincial jail, in which they are put in contact with higher-risk offenders than themselves, which increases their risk of reoffending and continuing the cycle (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). While there is rehabilitative programming within prisons and some jails, such treatment effects and programming may not transfer into life after incarceration (Richie, 2001). Furthermore, the public will, whether directly (victimization) or indirectly (through the tax dollars spent on the offender in the criminal justice system), be influenced by these repeated crimes (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). In order to protect the public and prevent future crime, more needs to be done to understand which offenders are being left behind in terms of proper treatment.

Research on the efficacy of rehabilitation suggests that it has a positive impact on the future behaviour of offenders (Warner & Kramer, 2009). However, research on patterns of criminal sentencing indicate that not all offenders have an equal chance at receiving the more “lenient” sentence of rehabilitation (Rodriguez et al., 2006; Zamble & Kalm, 1990). Therefore, additional information is needed to determine if there are still biases in the types of sentences particular offenders receive and whether these biases also impact whether an offender will be rehabilitated. Furthermore, since there is contradictory evidence as to whether women sentence offenders more punitively than do men (Applegate et al., 2002; ForsterLee et al., 2006), more knowledge is needed about the overall sentencing patterns of women as a whole.

The present study investigated whether the gender and age of offenders affected the type and length of sentence they were given by female participants. Specifically, the

purpose of this study was to identify if gender and age affected whether an offender was deemed deserving of rehabilitation or if it was believed that they should be incarcerated (a more punitive sentence). Punitivity was measured based on the sentence given (rehabilitation center versus prison) and the length of the sentence, with longer sentences being considered more punitive. Because of gender differences in respondent sentencing, an all female sample was used to observe within-group differences of sentencing disparity based on the age and gender of the offender.

Based on past research, it was hypothesized that gender (male or female) and age (youth or adult) of an offender in a crime vignette would affect the sentence that respondents delivered. Specifically, adult males were predicted to receive the most punitive prison sentences, while female youths were expected to receive sentences that required short-term rehabilitative treatment. In other words, males and adults were expected to be sentenced to a rehabilitative sentence less often than females and youth offenders. Based on the idea that the public prefers more punitive sentencing, prison sentences were expected to be the sentence-of-choice for participants, with prison sentence being assigned to offenders more often than rehabilitation.

Furthermore, this study explored whether there was a relationship between the age and gender of an offender and participants' overall attitudes about the effectiveness of rehabilitation compared to prison. It was hypothesized that reading a vignette in which the offender is a youth would lead to participants' support for rehabilitation as a sentencing option.

Method

Participants

This study involved the use of female undergraduate students enrolled in the Psychology 1000 course at Brescia University College. Participants ($N=103$) were recruited through the SONA system and directed to an online Qualtrics survey. Participants were granted one credit toward their grade in the Psychology 1000 course for the completion of this study. A total of 134 participants signed up for the study on the SONA system. After blank responses, repeated responses, and male responses were accounted for, 103 responses remained. The mean age of the remaining participants was 19 years old.

Materials

Demographic Questionnaire. A three-item questionnaire (See Appendix A) was created for the purpose of this study to assess demographic information about participants. The questionnaire inquired about the gender of participants to ensure that the sample was exclusively female. Participants' age and knowledge of the criminal justice system were evaluated, since such factors may contribute to knowledge about, and opinions of, criminal sentencing.

Crime stories. Participants were exposed to one of five crime stories (See Appendix B) which were created for the purpose of this study. Each story described a fictional offender of various genders and ages (youth male, youth female, adult male, adult female, or gender- and age-neutral) and the crime for which they were convicted. The plot of each crime story was constant—the offender tried to rob a store to obtain money for their drug addiction and the police arrived—but the age and gender of the offender is varied in each of the five conditions. The structure of the crime stories was

inspired by case studies described by Long (2010), while the specific criminal offenses were chosen based on crime statistics on the Statistics Canada database (2019).

Sentencing Questionnaire. Participants completed a Sentencing Questionnaire (SQ; See Appendix C) which was adapted from Warner, Davis, Walter, Bradfield, and Vermey (2010) for the purpose of this study. As a measure of the punitivity of criminal sentences, the SQ was comprised of two items related to (1) the sentence the participant felt the offender in the crime story deserves and (2) the length of the sentence the participant felt this offender should receive. Skip-logic was used to direct participants from their answer in Question 1 to a subsequent question about the length of sentencing. Participants were given the option to sentence the offender to incarceration (most punitive), rehabilitation, or release (least punitive). If incarceration was chosen, the offender could be sentenced from “Less than 1 year” of incarceration (least punitive) up to “10 or more years” in prison (most punitive). If rehabilitation was chosen, options for release ranged from when “they are better” (least punitive) to “never” (most punitive). Finally, those who chose to release the offender were directed to the next scale.

Treatment Attitude Scale. Four items from the Treatment Attitude Scale (TAS; See Appendix D), developed by McCorkle (1993) were used to measure participants’ attitudes about the treatment and rehabilitation of particular offenders. The scale used a Likert rating system, ranging from “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree” for each statement about the importance and effectiveness of rehabilitation.

Procedure

Once participants read the Call for Participants and selected the current study on the SONA system, they were directed to a survey on Qualtrics. Participants were asked to read through the Letter of Information and informed consent was required in order to continue with the study. Once participants had indicated that they agreed to participate, they completed the Demographic Questionnaire. Next, participants were asked to read one of the five randomized crime stories and then complete the SQ to sentence the offender. Once participants selected the type and length of sentence for the offender, they completed the TAS to assess their attitudes about the possibility of rehabilitation for the offender. Finally, participants were debriefed and automatically granted a course credit through SONA.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Analysis Plan

The majority of participants indicated that they possessed either “a moderate amount of knowledge” (37.9%) or “a little knowledge” (51.5%) of the Criminal Justice System in Canada. Out of 103 participants, 82 (79.61%) sentenced the offender to a period of rehabilitation, compared to 20 (19.42%) participants who sentenced the offender to incarceration. Only one participant (.97%) chose to release the offender. Of those who sentenced the offender to incarceration, 13 participants gave the offender a sentence of one to three years. Out of the 82 participants who sentenced the offender to a rehabilitation center, 52 (64.20%) chose to release them once they were “deemed fit to be back in the community”. However, because only 20 participants chose incarceration as the sentence for the offender, the resulting sample sizes were too small to further analyze the effects of offender gender and age on length of sentence within

each sentencing option. The manipulated gender and age differences of the offender between conditions were not evenly distributed within the 20 participants who chose to incarcerate the offender. Therefore, only the type of sentence (incarceration, rehabilitation, or release) given to the offender was considered in participants' punitivity score on the SQ.

The SQ and TAS were analyzed separately as two different constructs. The SQ measured the punitivity of the sentence given, while the TAS measured participants' attitudes (whether supportive or unsupportive) about the use of rehabilitation for the particular offender to which they were exposed. Two separate 2×2 (Gender [male, female] \times Age [adult, youth]) between-subjects factorial analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used—one to analyze the effect of gender and age of offenders on the punitivity of the sentence they were given and the other to measure the effect of gender and age of offenders on the attitudes that participants had about the use of rehabilitation for that specific offender.

Finally, four separate one-way ANOVAs were used to compare the punitivity and attitudes of participants in the manipulation group to those in the control group. The first one-way ANOVA compared the SQ punitivity score of participants who sentenced female offenders (adult and youth) with those in the control group who sentenced the gender and age-neutral offender. An additional ANOVA compared the punitivity of participants exposed to the fictional male offender (adult and youth) with the punitivity of those in the control group. Furthermore, two more one-way ANOVAs analyzed the differences between the attitudes toward rehabilitation of those in the manipulation group compared to those in the control group. One ANOVA compared the attitudes of

participants in the female offender condition with the attitudes of those in the control condition, while the other compared the attitudes of participants in the male offender condition with the attitudes of those in the control condition.

Analysis of Offender Gender and Age and Participant Punitivity

Across all conditions involving the gender and age of the offender, participants were generally lenient in sentencing the offender on the SQ ($M = 2.18$, $SD = .42$). The first 2×2 (Gender [male, female] \times Age [adult, youth]) between-subjects factorial ANOVA analyzed the effects of the gender and age of the fictional offender on the punitivity of the sentence that participants chose. Overall, participants sentenced male offenders ($M = 2.19$, $SD = .40$) and female offenders ($M = 2.17$, $SD = .44$) similarly on the SQ in terms of punitivity. Therefore, there was no significant main effect of offender gender on the punitivity of the sentence participants delivered, $F(1, 1) = .12$, $p = .73$. However, adult offenders ($M = 2.28$, $SD = .46$) were sentenced significantly more punitive than youth offenders ($M = 2.09$, $SD = .36$), indicating a significant main effect of offender age on punitivity at the .05 level, $F(1, 1) = 4.66$, $p = .03$ (see Figure 1). Therefore, the age of an offender has an effect on the type of sentence they are given.

Adult male offenders ($M = 2.32$, $SD = .48$) were sentenced slightly more punitively than adult female offenders ($M = 2.25$, $SD = .44$), while youth offenders were sentenced similarly whether they were male or female (males: $M = 2.09$, $SD = .29$; females: $M = 2.09$, $SD = .43$). However, there was not a significant interaction between the gender and age of the offender on the sentence the offender received, $F(1, 80) = 0.15$, $p = .70$.

Analysis of Offender Gender and Age and Participant Attitudes

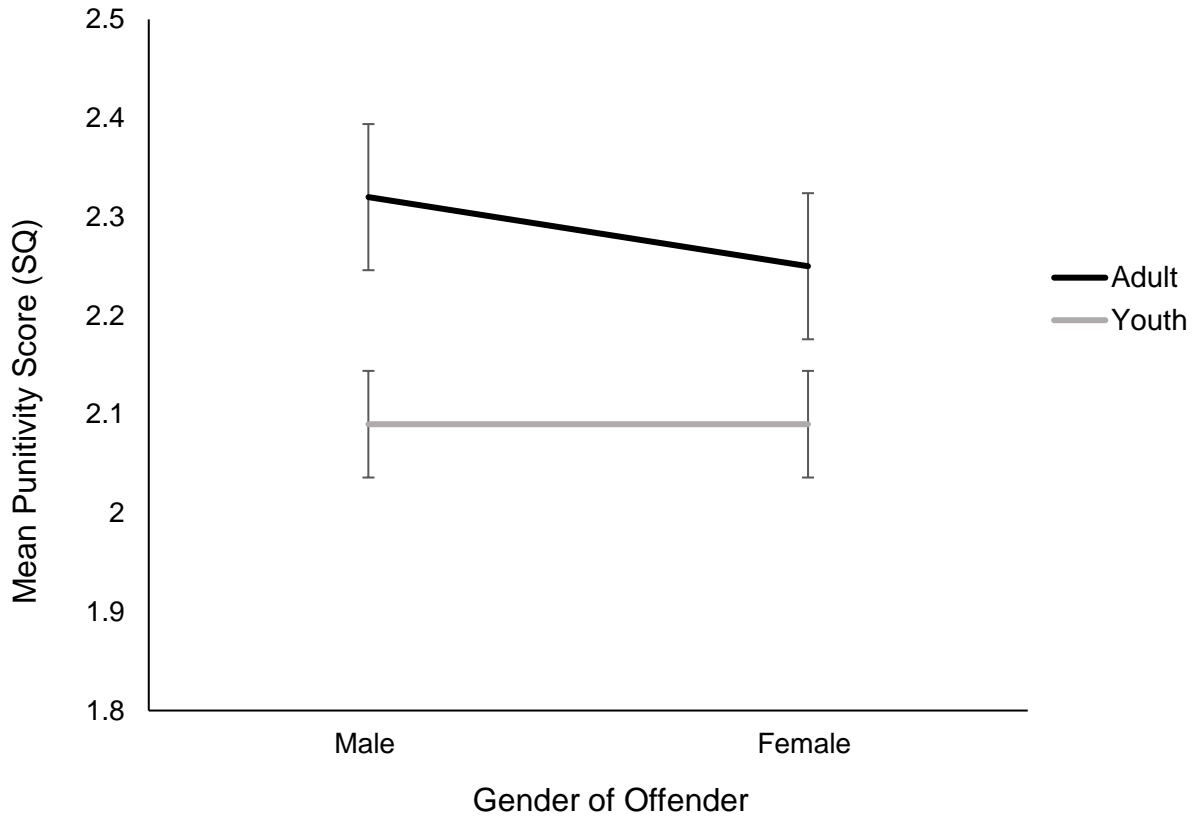


Figure 1 The significant main effect of age of offender on the punitivity of sentences given by female participants. The fictional youth offenders were sentenced less punitively than the fictional adult offenders, regardless of the gender of the offender.

A second 2×2 (Gender [male, female] \times Age [adult, youth]) between-subjects factorial ANOVA analyzed the effects of the gender and age of the fictional offender on participants attitudes about rehabilitation efforts on the TAS. Participants who read about offenders with a specified gender and age were relatively supportive of rehabilitation ($M = 2.04$, $SD = .67$). Participants held similar attitudes about rehabilitation for both female ($M = 2.04$, $SD = .65$) and male ($M = 2.04$, $SD = .69$) offenders. There was no significant main effect of offender gender on participants' attitudes toward rehabilitation, $F(1, 1) = 0.003$, $p = .96$, suggesting that participants generally agree with the implementation and effectiveness of rehabilitative sentences, regardless of the gender of the offender. Furthermore, there were no significant differences in attitudes about rehabilitation between those sentencing an adult ($M = 2.02$, $SD = .61$) compared to a youth ($M = 2.06$, $SD = .72$) offender, $F(1, 1) = 0.06$, $p = .81$. Overall, there was no significant interaction between the gender and age of offenders on participant attitudes, $F(1, 79) = 0.04$, $p = .84$. Therefore, attitudes about the use of rehabilitation with specific offenders are not influenced by the offender's gender, age, or an interaction between the two factors.

Analysis of Experimental Groups vs Control Group

The first one-way ANOVA was carried out to determine whether the punitivity of the criminal sentences differed between participants in experimental conditions who sentenced a male offender (adult and youth) compared to participants in the control condition. Participants in the adult male offender condition ($M = 2.32$, $SD = .48$) sentenced the offender more punitively than did individuals in the control condition, who sentenced a gender- and age-neutral offender ($M = 2.21$, $SD = .42$). Furthermore,

individuals in the control condition sentenced their offender slightly more punitively than those who sentenced the youth male offender ($M = 2.09$, $SD = .29$) (see Figure 2).

These differences between conditions were not statistically significant, $F(2, 58) = 1.76$, $p = .18$, indicating that the punitivity of the sentences given by participants did not differ because of knowing the offender's gender (male) and age.

Another ANOVA was used to measure the difference in sentences given to fictional female offenders (adult female, youth female) compared to the control offender. Participants exposed to the adult female and youth female offender vignettes only slightly differed from the control group in the punitivity of the sentences they delivered. The adult female offender ($M = 2.25$, $SD = .44$) was given more punitive sentences, on average, than both the gender- and age-neutral offender sentenced by the control group ($M = 2.17$, $SD = .38$) and the youth female offender ($M = 2.09$, $SD = .43$). Despite these slight differences in punitivity, the control group offender did not receive significantly different scores compared to the adult or youth female offenders, $F(2, 57) = 0.75$, $p = .48$. Once again, this confirms that the punitivity of the sentences given by participants was not necessarily impacted by the offender's gender and age.

Two more one-way ANOVAs were used to look at attitudes about rehabilitating the offender between the experimental groups (the offender's gender and age were described) and the control group (no gender or age of offender identified). As shown in Figure 3, attitudes about rehabilitation for the male offenders differed from the control group for both the adult and youth offender. Participants in the control group ($M = 1.87$, $SD = .61$) showed more favourable rehabilitation attitudes than did participants exposed

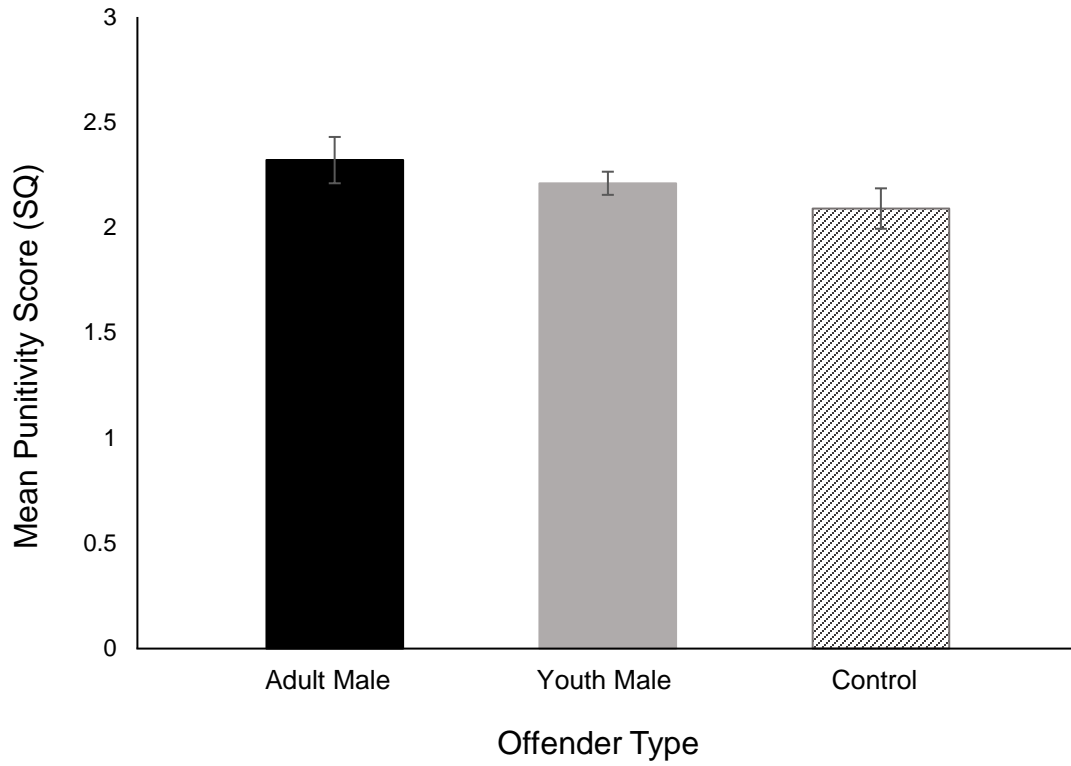


Figure 2 Mean punitivity of sentence between the experimental groups versus the control group. The adult male offender was sentenced more punitively than both the youth male offender and the control offender.

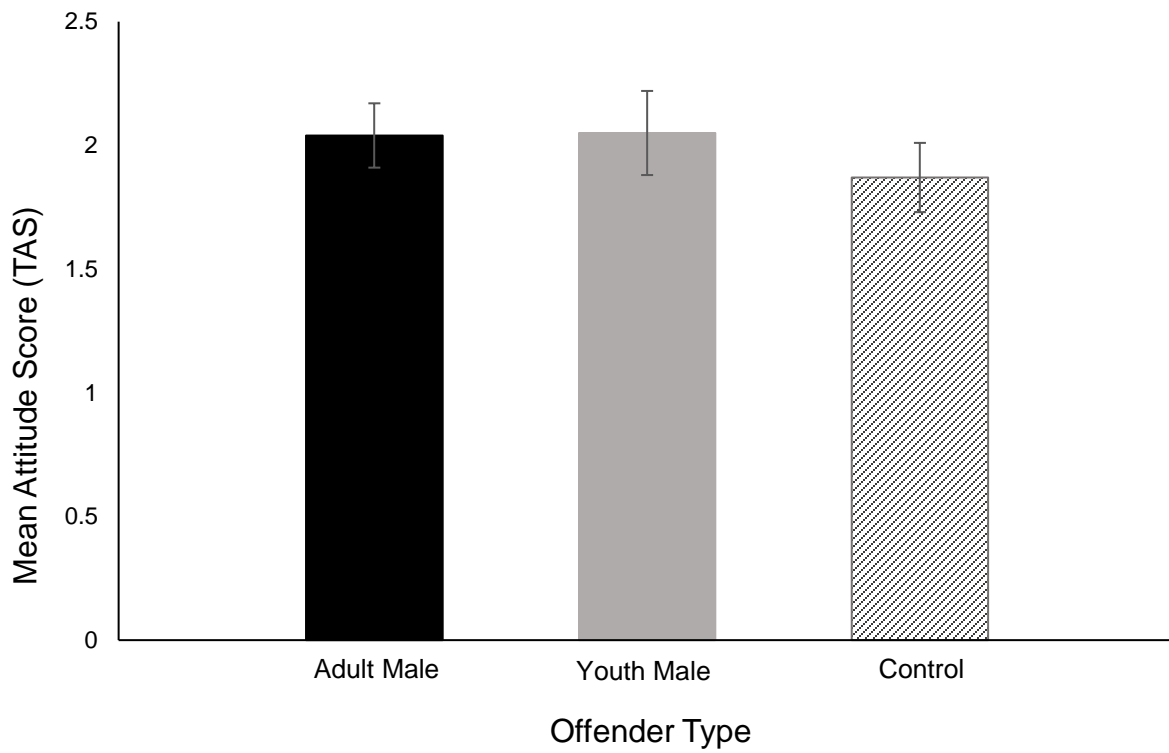


Figure 3 Mean attitudes of participants by the type of offender they sentenced. Participants who sentenced the adult male and youth male offenders had less supportive attitudes about rehabilitation than the participants who sentenced the control offender.

to the adult male ($M = 2.04$, $SD = .57$) and the youth male ($M = 2.05$, $SD = .80$) offenders. These differences in attitudes were not significant, $F(2, 57) = .43$, $p = .65$, which suggests that knowing the offender is a male and having knowledge of their age does not significantly impact participant's attitudes about how treatable the offender is.

To determine if the attitudes directed toward female offenders differed from the control group, another one-way ANOVA was conducted. As displayed in Figure 4, differences between the adult and youth female offenders and the control offender were slight, with those exposed to the adult ($M = 2.00$, $SD = .67$) and youth ($M = 2.07$, $SD = .65$) females being slightly less supportive of rehabilitation than those exposed to the control ($M = 1.87$, $SD = .61$). These differences were not statistically significant, however, $F(2, 58) = 0.50$, $p = .61$. Therefore, participants' attitudes about rehabilitating the offender were not impacted by the offender's gender or age, as similar attitudes were found in those who knew the gender and age of the offender and those who did not.

Discussion

It was hypothesized that the gender and age of the fictional offenders would influence both the sentences they are given by participants and the attitudes that participants had about the usefulness of rehabilitation. The hypothesis that the gender of the offender would affect the punitivity of the sentence that participants delivered was not supported. Male and female offenders were sentenced similarly in terms of punitivity. The prediction that the offender's age would influence punitivity was supported, however. Participants delivered more lenient sentences to youth offenders compared to adult offenders. While it was expected that prison would be the sentence

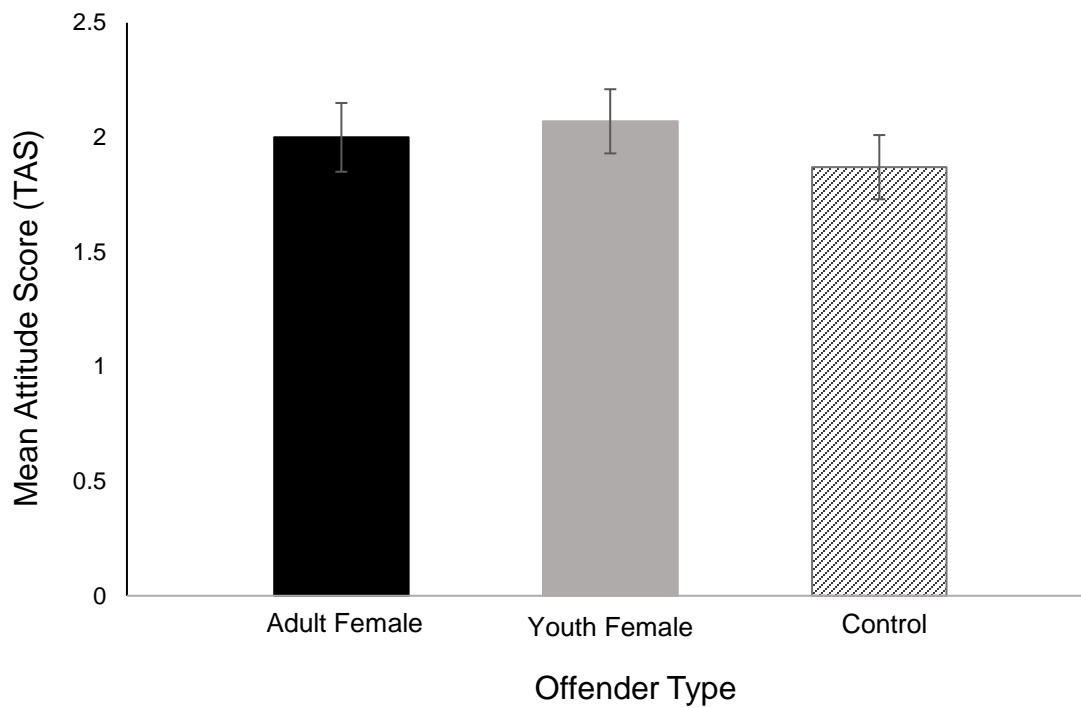


Figure 4 Mean attitudes of participants by the type of offender they sentenced. Participants in the youth female condition had less supportive attitudes about rehabilitating the youth female offender. Those is the control condition who did not know the age or gender of the offender showed the most supportive attitudes toward rehabilitation.

of choice for participants, the majority of participants chose to sentence the offender to rehabilitation. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that the gender and age of the fictional offender would influence participants' attitudes about the efficacy of rehabilitation as a sentencing option for the offender. However, this prediction was not supported, as attitudes about rehabilitation did not significantly differ based on offender age and gender.

These results contradict the existing literature on gender differences of offenders in criminal sentencing. Previous studies have indicated that female offenders receive more lenient sentences than male offenders (Kääriäinen, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2006). In the present study, however, male and female offenders were sentenced similarly in terms of punitivity. While Rodriguez et al. (2006) found that male offenders were more likely than female offenders to be sentenced to prison, the present study found that both genders were sentenced to rehabilitation—rather than prison—at similar rates. The type of crime an offender commits has also been linked to gender differences in criminal sentencing (Rodriguez et al., 2006). Men who committed stereotypically “feminine”, non-violent crimes received harsher sentences than females who committed the same crime (Rodriguez et al., 2006). However, the crime vignette in the current study featured the offender committing the same offence—non-violent robbery fueled by the offender's need to support a drug addiction—in the male offender, female offender, and the gender-neutral conditions. These results indicate that biases and stereotypes regarding gender and crime are not as prevalent as previously reported, at least not for female participants.

The significant effect of offender age on criminal sentencing was consistent with past literature. Similar to Zamble and Kalm (1990), participants sentenced the youth offenders to more lenient, more rehabilitative sentences compared to the adult offenders. However, age of offender was only significant when compared within the experimental groups. There was not a significant difference in punitivity between the experimental group and the control group. Participants in the youth and adult offender conditions did not sentence the offender differently than those in the neutral offender condition. This similarity of sentencing suggests that the initial significant effect of age could be attributed to chance or confounding factors. The lack of true a significant effect of age contradicts the literature in that youth are typically sentenced more leniently than adults. However, since the majority of the youth offenders were sentenced to rehabilitation, the youth offenders were still sentenced in a lenient and rehabilitation-focused manner, supporting the literature.

The public typically favours more rehabilitative and preventive sentences for youth offenders compared to adult offenders, perhaps because youth offenders are seen as more likely than adult offenders to be capable of changing their ways and improving their lives (Barretto et al., 2018). Furthermore, support for the rehabilitation of youth offenders could be related to the legislation of the Canadian criminal justice system. Since being implemented in 2003, the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) has ensured that police and prosecutors use extrajudicial, or out-of-court, measures when considering appropriate consequences for the youth offender (Government of Canada, 2017). The implementation of the YCJA could have led to the commonly held view by the Canadian public that youth offenders should be treated leniently and with a

rehabilitative and preventative outlook (Barretto et al., 2018; Government of Canada, 2017). The results of the present study have not contradicted the idea that the public supports the rehabilitation of youth offenders, rather, the results have supported the idea that the public may be becoming less punitive in its sentencing of adult offenders.

Research has shown that the Canadian public is typically punitive in their sentencing preferences and has negative perceptions about the effectiveness of rehabilitation at controlling offenders (Adams et al., 2015; McCorkle, 1993; Rogers, 2004; Zamble & Kalm, 1990). However, the present study demonstrated that such attitudes about the criminal justice system and rehabilitation may not be as prevalent in the population as once thought. Participants' attitudes about the abilities of rehabilitative efforts to prevent reoffending were not influenced by the gender or age of the fictional offender. The majority of participants, in fact, showed supportive attitudes toward rehabilitative treatment for offenders and the potential of rehabilitation to reduce reoffending. Participants overwhelmingly sentenced the fictional offender to rehabilitation, indicating that public attitudes toward rehabilitation and sentencing may not be as negative and punitive as previously thought.

This study does offer some limitations, however. Firstly, the sample was not representative in terms of gender and education. The all-female sample was used to further investigate the sentencing patterns of women. Without a male comparison group, however, no conclusions can be made as to whether women are more or less punitive than men. Furthermore, the use of an undergraduate sample could have biased results. The majority of participants indicated that they had at least some knowledge of the criminal justice system, which could have contributed to the overwhelming support

for rehabilitation compared to incarceration. Individuals with less education about the benefits of rehabilitation may have viewed incarceration as the more suitable sentence for the fictional offender. Additionally, liberal ideologies are common among university populations and tend to place great importance on social programs and rehabilitation, which could have additionally contributed to the observed preference for rehabilitation (Falco & Turner, 2014).

Secondly, this study lacked representation in terms of the characteristics of the fictional offenders. Many other characteristics about an offender—beyond gender and age—can influence the sentence the offender receives. Socioeconomic status (SES), class, race, religion, health, and other factors about an offender may all have a role in the type and severity of punishment an offender receives (Berryessa, 2019; ForsterLee et al., 2006). Finally, the use of crime stories and fictional vignettes may not be generalizable to the actual experience of sentencing an offender. Vignettes allow for participants to be exposed to a specific case and the context of a crime, but the actual processes that legal professionals and jurors participate in require much more thought, evidence, and knowledge of the offender's history than what can be gauged from a sample vignette. The behaviours and decisions of individuals involved in criminal sentencing can only be truly understood through studying such individuals in practice.

Future studies in the area of sentencing patterns, punitivity, and attitudes about sentencing options should expand on the sample demographics, offender characteristics, and settings that could influence the sentence an individual receives in the Canadian criminal justice system. A more diverse sample in terms of education, gender, political affiliations, and many more factors should be considered. Additionally,

it could be useful to investigate the relationship between participants' knowledge of the criminal justice system and their sentencing patterns to determine if such knowledge contributes to support for rehabilitation. Furthermore, the SES, education level, race, religion, sexual orientation, and sexual identity of offenders should be investigated in relation to the types and severity of sentences they received. Future studies should explore whether there are biases in sentencing decisions based on prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination of certain types of offenders, to ensure that all offenders receive an equal chance at being given a sentence that prevents them from reoffending and helps them become good citizens.

Despite the limitations of this study, the overall support for rehabilitation as a sentencing option is a positive finding and provides hope for progress in the Canadian criminal justice system. An increasing amount of research has indicated that time in prison does more harm than good for the well-being of both offenders and society in general (Gendreau, 1999; March & Fox, 2008). Rehabilitation and proper treatment, rather than incarceration, have been shown to provide offenders with adequate tools and coping strategies to help them be reintegrated into society and reoffend less (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Marsh & Fox, 2008; Warner & Kramer, 2009). Past research has suggested that sentencing may be biased based on specific offender characteristics, however, which can create disparity in the types of offenders who get access to rehabilitative sentences. Certain offenders, especially adult males, have received harsher and less treatment-oriented sentences compared to other populations. This disparity prevents such offenders from learning from their mistakes and developing skills that can get them out of a life of crime (Rodriguez et al., 2006; Tong & Farrington,

2006). Contradictory to past research, the present study found that there was overwhelming support for rehabilitation and no gender or age biases in sentencing, which suggests a positive future for sentencing in Canada and hope for offenders looking to get help.

While using a university sample can be seen as a limitation of this study, it is also a benefit. University students are future law enforcement, law-makers, juries, and judges. This population is important to investigate because the attitudes they hold and the sentencing tendencies they have may affect the criminal justice system and offenders in the future. If rehabilitation is supported and offenders are sentenced to such “lenient” measures, regardless of gender or age, then offenders will be better able to reintegrate into the community, reoffend less, and improve their overall quality of life (Marsh & Fox 2008; Warner & Kramer, 2006; Wormith et al., 2007; Tong & Farrington, 2009). The Canadian government could see significant reforms, including less spending on housing inmates and maintenance of prisons, less reoffending, and lower crime rates. Furthermore, reductions in recidivism and lower crime rates could result in less public spending on court proceedings, a decrease in victimization, and an increase in public well-being and safety.

Rehabilitation as a sentencing option has the potential to improve the lives of both offenders and the Canadian public. However, if not all offenders are being given the same opportunities, such improvements will not occur. Ensuring that offenders of all classes, races, sexual identities and orientations, religions, genders, and ages are given the same opportunities is essential in reducing the damaging effects that incarceration and the criminal justice system have on individuals, families, and communities. The

emerging generations of women provide optimism for the criminal justice system, offenders, and the public.

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Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

Age What is your age?

Gender What gender do you identify as?

Male

Female

Other _____

How much knowledge do you have of the criminal justice system?

A great deal of knowledge

A lot of knowledge

A moderate amount of knowledge

A little knowledge

No knowledge at all

Appendix B

Crime Stories

Condition 1: Adult Male Offender

Please read the following crime vignette, then proceed to the next page.

One night, Daniel, age 32, was trying to rob a convenience store to obtain money to support his drug addiction. Police arrived at the scene before he was finished robbing the store. Daniel tried to run away from police, but he was eventually caught and arrested. Daniel was convicted of attempted robbery and resisting arrest.

Condition 2: Adult Female Offender

Please read the following crime vignette, then proceed to the next page.

One night, Leah, age 32, was trying to rob a convenience store to obtain money to support her drug addiction. Police arrived at the scene before she was finished robbing the store. Leah tried to run away from police, but she was eventually caught and arrested. Leah was convicted of attempted robbery and resisting arrest.

Condition 3: Youth Male Offender

Please read the following crime vignette, then proceed to the next page.

One night, Daniel, age 16, was trying to rob a convenience store to obtain money to support his drug addiction. Police arrived at the scene before he was finished robbing the store. Daniel tried to run away from police, but he was eventually caught and arrested. Daniel was convicted of attempted robbery and resisting arrest.

Condition 4: Youth Female Offender

Please read the following crime vignette, then proceed to the next page.

One night, Leah, age 16, was trying to rob a convenience store to obtain money to support her drug addiction. Police arrived at the scene before she was finished robbing the store. Leah tried to run away from police, but she was eventually caught and arrested. Leah was convicted of attempted robbery and resisting arrest.

Condition 5: Control Offender

Please read the following crime vignette, then proceed to the next page.

One night an individual was trying to rob a convenience store to obtain money to support their drug addiction. Police arrived at the scene before they were finished robbing the store. The individual tried to run away from police, but was eventually caught and arrested. The individual was convicted of attempted robbery and resisting arrest.

Appendix C

Sentencing Questionnaire

1. What sentence do you think the offender deserves?

- They should be incarcerated.
- They should be sent to a rehabilitation center.
- They should be released.

2. How long should the offender be incarcerated for?

- Less than 1 year.
- Between 1 and 3 years.
- Between 4 and 6 years.
- Between 7 and 9 years.
- More than 10 years.

OR

2. How long should the offender receive treatment at a rehabilitation center for?

- Until they are better.
- Until they are deemed fit to be back in the community.
- Until they no longer do drugs or steal.
- They should never be released.

Appendix D

Adapted Treatment Attitude Scale (McCorkle, 1990)

1. Trying to rehabilitate this person would probably be a waste of time.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

2. This offender would probably benefit from psychological counselling programs

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

3. If this offender received educational and vocational training, they probably would not commit crimes in the future.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

4. More effort needs to be made to expand and improve programs that would give this offender the chance to change their life.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree