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Jennifer Suter

University of South Australia

Mitchell K. Byrne

University of Wollongong, mbyrne@uow.edu.au

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Female offenders are different form male offenders: Anger as an example

Abstract

Anger is a common, universally experienced emotion, which occurs on a continuum from mild annoyance to rage or fury (Daffenbacher et al., 1996). Anger is likely to occur when a person believes their personal rights or codes have been violated. Similarly, anger can occur when a person feels powerless or threatened (Horn and Towl, 1997). Anger consists of interrelated, reciprocal components (Novaco, 1975). Environmental circumstances often trigger anger. Physiological symptoms can serve to alert the individual that they are angry, and can help them provide a label to that anger. Cognitions refer to the individual's style of thinking about, or perception of the events. This encompasses their appraisals, attitudes and beliefs. Behaviour is the final component and involves the behavioural reaction in response to the event or the anger itself.

Keywords

example, different, anger, offenders;, female, form, male, offenders

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FEMALE OFFENDERS ARE DIFFERENT FROM MALE OFFENDERS: ANGER AS AN EXAMPLE

Jennifer Suter
Student, University of South Australia
and
Mitch Byrne
Lecturer, University of South Australia

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convened by the Australian Institute of Criminology
in conjunction with the Department for Correctional Services SA
and held in Adelaide, 31 October – 1 November 2000*

Introduction

Anger is a common, universally experienced emotion, which occurs on a continuum from mild annoyance to rage or fury (Daffenbacher et al., 1996). Anger is likely to occur when a person believes their personal rights or codes have been violated. Similarly, anger can occur when a person feels powerless or threatened (Horn and Towl, 1997).

Anger consists of interrelated, reciprocal components (Novaco, 1975). Environmental circumstances often trigger anger. Physiological symptoms can serve to alert the individual that they are angry, and can help them provide a label to that anger. Cognitions refer to the individual's style of thinking about, or perception of the events. This encompasses their appraisals, attitudes and beliefs. Behaviour is the final component and involves the behavioural reaction in response to the event or the anger itself.

Anger and Correctional Services

Despite the many positive functions of anger (Novaco, 1976), this emotion nonetheless poses difficulties for those with poor control over or expression of anger. This may be especially true in correctional settings. Anger can play a role in violent behaviour. Reactive violence refers to behaviour, which occurs as a result of anger or rage (such as assault during an argument), while instrumental violence views violent behaviour as a means to an end (such as armed robbery with violence, to obtain cash). Because of this link between anger and reactive violence (Brown and Howells, 1996), anger is often targeted as a variable to change when rehabilitating offenders. Disciplinary incidents, particularly those involving violent behaviour, are also of concern within institutions. Therefore anger represents both a management and a treatment consideration.

As Mitch Byrne has just illustrated in his presentation ("Key Issues in the Provision of Correctional Services of Women"), correctional service providers are under-resourced. This serves to limit the availability of services, and so generic programs are offered, which will benefit a large range of offenders. Yet to fit the principles of Risk, Need and Responsivity (Bonta, 1997; Andrews, Bonta and Hoge, 1990), it is important to ensure these programs are appropriately designed to reflect the needs and style of the target offender. Due to this very lack of resources, and the small number of females within correctional systems (Easteal, 1992), women are often given lesser attention than males, and subsequently, are offered programs designed for males, using male-based research (Koons et al., 1997).

Sex Differences in Anger

Within the general research literature, attention has recently been cast upon anger in females, and this has raised speculation about gender differences in anger. The results so far have not conclusively addressed these questions. Normal or college populations have tended not to differ largely on anger or anger expression (Kopper 1993; Kopper and Epperson, 1996; Kopper and Epperson, 1991). In contrast, some literature suggests that special populations (such as clinical samples), may in fact display sex-differences (Novaco, 1994; Sharkin, 1993; Funabiki et al., 1980).

This research aimed to rectify the lack of attention paid to women's anger within correctional settings. The purpose was two-fold: to gather normative data on objective measures of anger, and to investigate the possibility of a sex-difference in the anger of offenders.

Method

Sample: The sample was drawn from correctional institutions across South Australia and Western Australia. The women (N = 50) were from two facilities, the men (N = 121) from five facilities. Demographic data for each group can be seen in table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of male and female sample.**

Demographic Characteristic		Male (%)	Female (%)
Ethnic Origin	Australian	41.2	44.0
	Indigenous	28.6	30.0
	European	24.4	20.0
	Other	5.9	6.0
Normal Occupation	Unemployed*	75.9	77.6
	Clerk/Semiskilled	19.4	14.3
	Para/professional	3.7	8.2
Marital Status	Single	63.2	60
	Married	6.8	2.0
	Defacto	17.9	8.0
	Divorced	8.5	18.0
	Separated	3.5	12.0
Offence Type	Violent	52.8	12.0
	Property	5.7	54.0
	Other	41.5	34.0
Drug Use	None/no reply	35.6	28.0
	Marijuana	26.4	6.0
	Other non-intravenous	0.8	4.0
	Intravenous	6.6	38.0
	Poly-User	30.6	24.0
Alcohol-Related Arrests	None	50.0	71.7
	1	10.0	10.9
	2	4.5	2.2
	3	7.3	4.3
	4 or more	28.2	10.9
Sentence Length**	On Remand	N/A	18
	1 month or less	3.8	10
	2-12 months	26.0	26
	1-5 year	37.7	22
	Above five years	32.5	24
Previous incarceration	None	33.6	27.7
	1	16.0	23.4
	2-4	28.6	36.1
	5-7	8.3	6.4
	8 or more	13.4	6.4

*Note. 'Unemployed' includes homemaker and unskilled labour.

**Note. Based on Inmate report only

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire: This measure assessed participant characteristics, with questions pertaining to age, ethnic origin, marital status, education, employment, drug-use, alcohol-related arrests, previous incarceration, nature of crime and length of sentence.

State Trait Anger Expression Inventory (STAXI, Spielberger, 1991): The STAXI is a 44-item self-report measure. Section one assesses the intensity of anger (state anger). Participants rate their level of anger *right now* by responding to statements (for example, 'I am furious') on a four-point scale (1= Not at all, 4 = Very much so). Section two asks participants how they *generally* feel (trait anger), by responding to 10 self-descriptive statements, on a four-point frequency scale (1= Almost never, 4 = Almost always). Derived from Trait anger, are Angry Temperament (tendency toward anger without provocation) and Angry Reaction (anger upon specific provocation).

Section three involves 24 descriptions of *reactions* when angered (expression of anger). The four point scale indicates how often the statement is true for the participant (1= Almost never, 4= Almost always). The expression of anger is divided into sub-types. Anger expression out (AX/Out) involves the expression of anger through verbal or physical aggression (Spielberger, Reheiser and Sydeman, 1995). Anger expression in (AX/In) indicates anger that is felt, but not expressed (Spielberger et al., 1995). Control of the expression of angry feelings (AX/Con) measures how *frequently* participant's attempt to control that expression (Forgays, Forgays and Spielberger, 1997). Further, Ax/Ex (Anger Expression) is a measure of anger which is experienced and expressed either inwards or outwards.

The state and trait sections of the measure have been shown to have high internal validity when assessed individually during construction of the scale. Alpha coefficients of between .82 and .90 have been found in Navy and Undergraduate student samples (Forgays, Forgays and Spielberger, 1997). The scale has also been used in forensic populations (Watt and Howells, 1999; Cornell, Peterson and Richards, 1999).

Novaco Anger Scale (NAS, Novaco, 1994): Section A of the NAS measures three domains of anger (cognitive, arousal or physiological, and behavioural), each of which contain 4-subscales (O'Neill, 1995a). Section A comprises 44-items, describing things that people think, feel, or do. The participant responds on a three-point scale (1= Never true, 3= Always true) reflecting their level of agreement. Section A serves to assess deficits in the participants anger-regulation in each domain.

Section B assesses individual anger patterns, with five sub-scales of provocative events provided (Novaco, 1994; O'Neill, 1995a). 25 potentially anger-provoking situations are described, which are grouped into five-triggers for anger (disrespectful treatment, unfairness/injustice, frustration/interruption, annoying traits, and irritations). The participant indicates the intensity of anger produced by each, by responding on a 4-point scale (1= Not at all angry, 4= Very angry). The scale can discriminate between clinical and non-clinical samples (Jones, Thomas-Peter and Trout, 1999). Though empirical studies on the NAS are somewhat sparse, the scale has been found valid and reliable with many groups, including incarcerated offender populations (Smith, Smith and Beckner, 1994; Swaffer and Epps, 1999).

Procedure: All data was collected on female participants by the researcher. Participants read an information sheet and gave informed consent. Measures were completed unassisted where possible, alternatively, the researcher read aloud and completed the measures for the participant. An identical data collection procedure was used to obtain the data from male participants, in a separate study (Howells, et al., submitted).

Analysis: Data was analysed using SPSS for Windows. A two-by-two (sex = male or female; Offence = violent or non-violent) multi-variate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used, with each independent variable (STAXI sub-scales and NAS sub-scales).

Results

Anger: Normative data and sex-difference findings are displayed in table 2. As can be seen, there were significant anger differences between the groups, with females displaying consistently higher anger than males. Males however, exercised a higher level of control over their anger expression. Therefore, this sample of female prisoners present as having higher levels of anger with fewer efforts to control their anger than male prisoners.

Table 2: Sex-differences on anger variables.

Inventory	Male	Female	F-Value
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
STAXI			
State	11.99 (4.30) (N = 106)	15.45 (7.25) (N = 49)	13.253***
Trait	18.60 (7.22) (N = 106)	21.9 (7.87) (N = 50)	9.415**
Trait-R	7.91 (3.02) (N = 106)	9.00 (3.40) (N = 50)	6.220*
Trait-T	6.88 (3.24) (N = 106)	8.26 (3.84)	8.456**
Ax_In	16.59 (4.93) (N = 106)	18.37 (4.97) (N = 49)	6.964**
Ax_Out	15.99 (4.74) (N = 106)	17.49 (5.25) (N = 46)	4.502*
Ax_Con	22.48 (5.92) (N = 106)	19.33 (6.03) (N = 46)	7.331**
Ax_Ex	26.09 (11.74) (N = 106)	32.30 (12.21) (N = 46)	10.189**
NAS			
Part A	87.11 (18.61) N = 106	94.37 (18.73) N = 38	5.223*
Ar. Dom	27.88 (6.87) (N = 91)	31.64 (7.4) (N = 45)	8.792**
Be. Dom	27.76 (7.26) (N = 91)	30.22 (7.28) (N = 45)	4.560*
Co. Dom	30.25 (5.82) (N = 91)	32.80 (5.66) (N = 44)	5.056*
Disres.	12.06 (3.52) (N = 98)	10.92 (14.64) (N = 50)	0.540
Unfair.	13.08 (3.37) (N = 97)	14.68 (3.35) (N = 50)	4.286*
Frus.	12.24 (3.74) (N = 98)	11.00 (15.27) (N = 50)	0.554
Annoy.	11.92 (3.92) (N = 99)	12.22 (15.18) (N = 50)	0.001
Irrit.	11.14 (3.79) (N = 99)	9.94 (15.61) (N = 50)	0.730
Part B	57.94 (16.62) N = 106	58.76 (33.76) N = 50	0.001

Note. STAXI, State-Trait Anger Expression Scale; Trait R = Angry Reaction, Trait T = Angry Temperament, Ax_In = Anger expression in, Ax_Out = Anger expression out, Ax_Con = Anger expression control, Ax_Ex = Anger Expression.

Note. NAS, Novaco Anger Scale; Ar. Dom = Arousal domain, Be. Dom = Behavioural domain, Co. Dom = Cognitive domain, Disres. = Disrespectful treatment, Unfair. = Unfairness/Injustice, Frus. = Frustration/Interruption, Annoy. = Annoying traits, Irrit. = Irritations.

*P < .05 **P < .01 *** P < .001

Violence: Because of the low number of violent female offenders in the sample (N = 6), interaction effects were largely ignored. However, a pictorial representation of these findings makes for interesting discussion (see Figures 1 and 2). As can be seen, female violent offenders admitted to anger resulting from fewer triggering circumstances than male participants (whether violent or non-violent) or female non-violent participants.

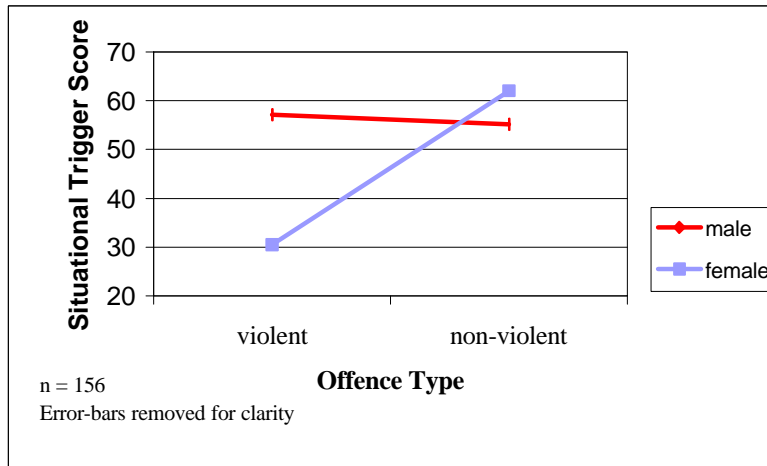


Figure 1: Triggers for Anger

In addition, violent females were found to display the lower anger expression with non-violent female offenders often displaying their anger. The opposite pattern was found in male participants, with violent males expressing more anger than non-violent.

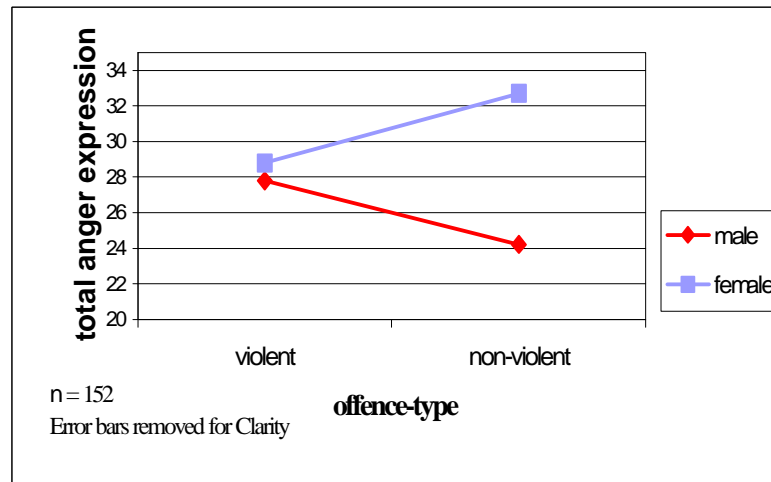


Figure 2: Anger Expression

Discussion

This study found significant differences in the anger and anger expression of male and female offenders. Specifically, females were found to have higher levels of anger (STAXI: State, trait, trait-reaction, trait-temperament, anger-in, anger-out, and total anger expression. NAS: cognitive, physiological, behavioural) and exercised lower levels of control over the expression of that anger. Violent female offenders were found to admit to fewer incidents as being anger provoking, and to express lower levels of anger than non-violent females.

Anger and Violence

The methodological flaws of this research make it injudicious to infer too much from the data on violent female offenders, these findings have support from other research. Ogle et al., argue that women's expression of anger is inhibited by societal norms and that this forces women to internalise negative emotions instead of expressing them as anger and directing that anger at the target. Ogle and colleagues go on to suggest that these social inhibitions which prevent expression of anger also inhibit the development of strategies to regulate anger. Hence women may develop high levels of pent-up anger with seemingly little control over either the development of angry feelings nor the appropriate release of those feelings.

The build-up of anger and inhibition in its expression has been discussed by Verona and Carbonell who applied Megargee's Overcontrolled / Undercontrolled Hostility paradigm to a female offender sample. Verona and Carbonell compared one-time violent, repeat violent and non-violent female offenders and observed that the majority of one-time violent women in their sample exhibited an overcontrolled style of aggressive responding, while the repeat violent and non-violent prisoners did not. Verona and Carbonell found that, in contrast to male samples, one-time violent offenders represent the majority of violent female offenders. Consequently, while undercontrolled hostility typifies male violent offenders, overcontrolled hostility typifies female violent offenders. The authors include personality, socialisation and experiential explanations for their results.

Reasons for Sex Differences

As for the former findings, variables beyond those measured in this study may shed light on women's high levels of anger. Experiential differences in the histories of male and female offenders have demonstrated considerable (pre-crime, pre-incarceration) differences. To illustrate this point, women in prison are often found to have experienced significantly greater levels of physical and sexual abuse in childhood than male prisoners (Walsh, 1999). This childhood victimisation often precedes the women entering into abusive relationships later in life (Zlotnick, 1999). Women's childhood and adulthood victimisation has been found to have a significant impact upon their emotional and psychological well-being (Lewis and Hayes, 1997)

Such experiences of victimisation strip the child and/or adult victim of their power and dignity. In connecting these experiential differences to anger, Horn and Towl (1997) refer to *chronic anger*, which occurs as a result of the powerlessness engendered in childhood trauma. Two manifestations of this anger are to be found in the most frequently reported psychopathology among female offenders; Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD).

Both of these disorders have been connected to childhood abuse and are diagnosed more commonly in females than males (Linehan, 1993; Raeside, 1994; Vine, 1994; Maden, 1997; Zlotnick, 1999). BPD is characterised by, among other symptoms, intense, inappropriate outbursts of anger, poor control over anger, impulsivity, and cognitive and affective distortions (APA, 1994). PTSD involves increased levels of arousal or hyper-arousal (APA, 1994), resulting in a 'survival mode' of functioning (Wilson and Zeiglebaum, 1986). This mode includes hypervigilance and cognitive interpretations that create perceptions of threat and hostile appraisals.

Problems of high anger have been identified in a variety of PTSD populations and appear to be of particular relevance to our population. As would be predicted, the incidence of PTSD closely matches that of childhood abuse. Raeside (1994) found that 81% of his Australian female prison sample, derived from the same institution as most of our subjects, met the criteria for PTSD, with a high co-morbidity for depression and substance abuse. This compares to a cited 8% to 16% incidence in the general population and 53% for a combat population.

The antecedent relevance of PTSD to female offending appears of particular importance. For example, the symptoms of PTSD include distressing emotional, physiological and perceptual/cognitive experiences. These symptoms elicit coping behaviours that, more often than not, involve the use of alcohol or other drugs (Raeside, 1994). Offending behaviour may be either a direct consequence of the PTSD (e.g. emotional volatility and hyper arousal) or linked to either the use of a substance or the need to acquire funds to purchase the substance. For example, Raeside (1994) observed that the most frequently used strategy to manage the distressing symptomology associated with PTSD was the abuse of substances.

This does not mean that abuse and subsequent PTSD causes crime. However there is evidence that treatment of abuse sequelae can reduce reoffending. This treatment might not necessarily be related to traditional anger management programs.

Summary and Future Research

This study suggests that the needs of angry women may be different to those of angry men, impacting on treatment responsivity issues. While neither mental health pathology nor prior abuse were measured in the present study, we hypothesise that the differences observed between male and female prisoners in their experience and expression of anger, and the relatively (to non-offender norms) high level of anger in this female prisoner sample are the result not of biological differences but rather of the higher incidence of psychopathology in this group. This psychopathology, in turn is likely to be the product of experiential differences between the sexes.

While further research is necessary to test our hypotheses relating to the role of victimisation and psychopathology as antecedents for high anger in females, this research none-the-less has immediate implications for correctional service providers. The high levels of anger found amongst this sample of female offenders, and the different profile on the components of anger, suggest that anger management programs may need to be adapted to meet the specific requirements of female prisoners. It is important for those involved in the treatment and management of female prisoners to note that women differed from men in both their experience and expression of anger as well as the triggers that promulgate angry feelings and behaviours. This means that assumptions that interventions and management strategies developed using male participants will equally benefit women may be questionable. Women prisoners appear to have gender specific needs in the area of anger. For angry prisoners, gender *is* important.

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Note: For references for Verona and Carbonell, and Ogle et al., contact Jennifer Suter at the following e-mail address:
sutm001@students.unisa.edu.au