



Anger in prisoners: women *are* different from men

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Abstract

Anger can contribute to offending behaviour and to behavioural difficulties in prison environments. As such, training in self-management of anger has been a common strategy in an attempt to reduce such behaviours. However, the vast majority of research into anger in offenders has been conducted using male participants. This has led to a lack of knowledge specific to the treatment needs of angry female prisoners. This paper investigates the extent to which a sample of Australian female offenders differs from Australian male offenders in their expression and experience of anger. Fifty women and 121 men were given the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory [Spielberger, C.D. (1991). *State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory: STAXI Professional Manual*. Florida: Psychological Assessment Resources] and the Novaco Anger Scale [Novaco, R. W. (1994). Anger as a risk factor for violence among the mentally disordered. In J. Monohan, & H. J. Steadman (Eds.), *Violence and mental disorder*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press]. The data collected from female participants was then contrasted with identical data collected from male inmates in the separate study [Howells, K., Day, A., Bubner, S., Jauncey, S. (2000). Anger needs and treatment responsivity in male prisoners. Unpublished manuscript: University of South Australia.]. Results indicated significant main effects for gender in a majority of the subscales of the two measures, with significant differences found in both the experience and expression of anger for male and female prisoners. The results are discussed in terms of the implications for correctional service providers with respect to the specific psychological needs of female offenders. Crown Copyright © 2002 Published by Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

The vast majority of studies into anger in offenders have been conducted using male participants, (a problem that is not unique to the study of anger). Given that the ratio of male to female

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offenders averages 1:20 in USA, UK and Australia (Casale, 1998; Eastal, 1992; Koons, Burrow, Morash, & Bynum, 1997; Walsh, 1997), females remain a neglected population in many areas of criminological research. Consequently, correctional providers lack adequate knowledge about many facets of female offending. Despite the many differences that exist between male and female offenders, programs and services designed for males are extended to female offenders with little alteration (Koons et al., 1997). This is true of anger management programs, (Horn & Towl, 1997). The lack of knowledge related to the treatment needs of angry female prisoners is particularly significant given that anger has been viewed as both a primary cause of female imprisonment (McDonagh, 1999), and as a consequence of their imprisonment (Pennix, 1999). An understanding of how male and female offenders compare in their experience and expression of anger will serve to ameliorate this situation. In this paper we will explore such comparisons, propose possible explanations for any differences observed and suggest a course for future research.

1.1. *Defining anger*

Anger is a universally experienced emotion. While anger does not necessarily result in antisocial behaviours, it has been demonstrated to be a major contributor to offending behaviour as well as a management concern for prison administrators (Howells, 1998). It was not until the latter half of the twentieth century that anger was subjected to rigorous scientific appraisal. This has largely been led by the work of Novaco (Meichenbaum & Novaco, 1985; Novaco, 1976, 1978, 1993, 1997) and Spielberger (Spielberger, 1991; Spielberger, Jacobs, Russell, & Crane, 1983).

Novaco's conceptualisation of anger has provided the theoretical foundation upon which to base the treatment of anger problems (Jones, Thomas-Peter & Trout, 1999; Novaco, 1994). The Novaco model describes anger as comprising three components which exert a reciprocal influence upon each other in response to an external trigger or environmental circumstance. The first of these are *cognitions*, which are viewed as central to the experience of anger and involve the angered individual's appraisals, expectations, attitudes and beliefs. Recent research confirms that individuals high in anger have distinctive patterns of cognitive appraisal (Hazebroek, Howells, & Day, 2001). The second component relates to *physiological arousal*. Where this occurs concurrently with an anger-related cognitive interpretation of the triggering circumstance, the physiological arousal is also likely to be subjectively labelled as anger. The emotion of anger can then give rise to Novaco's third component, *behavioural reactions*, which can range from verbal confrontation to physical assault or destruction of property (Daffenbacher et al., 1996). Novaco subsequently designed the Novaco Anger Scale, which assesses the experience of anger and the specific triggers that elicit an individual's anger (Jones et al., 1999; Novaco, 1994; O'Neill, 1995a).

Spielberger (Spielberger, 1991; Spielberger et al., 1983), on the other hand, has concentrated on 'dispositional' aspects of the individual in relation to anger. Spielberger has distinguished state and trait anger, the distinction reflecting the understanding that anger is both an emotional state, varying across time, situation and intensity, as well as a stable personality trait, reflecting a person's tendency to experience anger frequently or intensely (Spielberger & Sydeman, 1994; Spielberger et al., 1983). Spielberger has also introduced assessment of the forms of expression of anger, in the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory (STAXI; Spielberger, Sydeman, Owen, & Marsh, 1999).

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