

An examination of a sense of entitlement in violent men:
Violence towards others and the self

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any other university and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text.

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Publications from this Thesis

Sections of this thesis have already been presented as a book chapter, journal articles, conference paper and poster. They are as follows:

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Abstract

This body of work examines the concept of an inflated sense of entitlement, the modern term for a concept that can be traced back to Plato in 360 BCE (Before Christian Era). Although the concept is advanced and examined in philosophical terms, Plato's work is also considered to be one of the first and most comprehensive psychological theories of human motivation. A sense of entitlement is frequently referred to in contemporary literature, and yet there has been a lack of investigations into the nature of entitlement and how it operates in violent men. This investigation set out to rectify the deficiency by examining the concept through four studies. The global purpose of this thesis is to determine if an inflated sense of entitlement is related to both violent offending and self-harming behaviour.

The first study was designed to refine a definition of an inflated sense of entitlement for violent offenders and to determine if there was a qualitative difference in this characteristic between violent offenders and male members of the general public. The study examined twelve domains used to describe an inflated sense of entitlement. It also identified two main themes which were an action theme and an experiential theme. The action theme included actions that were likely to be elicited when an inflated sense of entitlement was violated. These actions were assault, confrontation and rejection of others. This was particularly so when the domains of anger, respect, power, obedience from subordinates and obedience from family and friends were violated. The experiential theme included emotions and cognition and whether these were expressed in an outward direction towards others or inwardly towards the self.

The second study was conducted on archival material from a prison database. It examined the self-harming behaviour of offenders currently incarcerated in Western Australia (WA). This study was conducted to test the assumption that violent offenders are more likely to self-harm than non-violent offenders, using a current cohort. It was revealed that violent offenders self-harm at a far higher rate than incarcerated non-violent offenders. Of the self-harming offenders, nine out of ten were violent offenders. It was also found that violent offenders were far less likely to have warnings of potential self-harm on the prison database than non-violent offenders.

The third study involved the construction and validation of the Sense of Entitlement Questionnaire (SOEQ) on a student population. The purpose of this study was to enable the measurement of an inflated sense of entitlement in violent men. The action themes and the domains from the first study formed the basis of the questions. This scale had sound psychometric properties and revealed two statistical factors indicating both attitude and behaviour subscales. Further investigations found differences in levels of an inflated sense of entitlement in terms of age and sex.

The fourth study was the administration of the SOEQ to violent and non-violent, as well as self-harming and non-self harming, incarcerated offenders. This was to establish the level of an inflated sense of entitlement in violent men as well as to establish the level of an inflated sense of entitlement in self-harming offenders. It was found that violent men have an inflated sense of entitlement in both attitude and behaviour. If their inflated sense of entitlement was violated then violence was most likely their first choice. This was particularly likely when the respect, power, forgiveness and anger domains were involved. When examining self-harming behaviour and entitlement, this study found a difference in attitude only.

This body of work demonstrated that an inflated sense of entitlement is related both to violent offending and self-harming behaviour. Through these investigations different aspects of an inflated sense of entitlement were identified, which included a strong desire for respect, power, admiration and status, as well as a profound aversion to feelings of shame, disrespect and humiliation. A violation of an inflated sense of entitlement has the capacity to end in violent behaviour towards others and harm towards the self. These findings show how an inflated sense of entitlement meets two of the three criteria required to qualify as a criminogenic need: that is, that the characteristic has the ability to distinguish non-criminal from criminal behaviour and has the ability to be measured. This opens the way for further research to investigate the third criterion required to qualify for a criminogenic need, which is whether an inflated sense of entitlement can be changed.

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Presentation Style

To assist with the interpretation of this thesis it is necessary to provide an explanation of the presentation style. This thesis consists of a series of four studies with each chapter consisting of a single study. However, for ease of reading, only one reference list is provided at the end of this thesis. APA 5th edition was used.