

Study Finds Attributions of Blame Differ Among Offender Types

Alcohol abusers and rapists differ from other incarcerated offenders in the ways in which they attribute blame, according to a recent study of offenders in a Canadian federal penitentiary.

An Attribution of Blame Scale was administered to 197 offenders, classified into four groups: rapists/alcohol abusers (44), rapists/non-alcohol abusers (21), non-rapists/ alcohol abusers (96) and non-rapists/ non-alcohol abusers (36).

Subjects were selected randomly from inmates whose crimes ranged from murder, manslaughter, rape, and kidnapping to theft, break-and-enter, possession of narcotics, and loitering. Of the total sample, 18% were serving life sentences, and the remainder were serving from 3 to 20 years.

The average number of crimes committed before the current incarceration offence was 9.44. The average level of education was grade 8.8.

The Attribution of Blame Scale, adapted from the Attributions of Rape Blame Scale, consisted of 24 items, subdivided into four areas of blame: victim blame, offender blame, societal and sociological blame, and alcohol blame.

The data show that rapists assigned more blame to their victims than to themselves, whereas non-rapists assigned more blame to the personality of the rapist than to other factors.

The alcohol-abuser groups were higher than the non-alcohol-abuser groups on their attribution of blame to alcohol. Non-alcohol abusers attributed slightly more blame to the victim and did not differ significantly from alcohol abusers in assigning blame to the offender's personality or to society.

The findings did not support the study's prediction that incarcerated rapists would attribute more blame to the victim than to other sources of blame. In fact, rapists assigned more blame to alcohol than to the victim. The author speculates that when given a choice, rapists cite the more socially accepted explanation for their actions. Moreover, they may cite alcohol because it is sometimes seen as lessening the personal responsibility of the offender.

This study represents an attempt to further our understanding of the offender's cognitive process by considering offender explanations for acts of violence and aggression. The author recommends additional research on correctional staff attributions of blame for incarcerated rapists and alcohol abusers. Further research could only help establish better rehabilitation programs for these types of offenders.

Loza, W., & Clements, P. (1990). Incarcerated Alcoholics' and Rapists' Attributions of Blame for Criminal Acts (unpublished report).