
**VICTIM EMPATHY ADVANCEMENT OF YOUTH SEX OFFENDERS
IN YOUTH CORRECTIONAL CENTRES****Laetitia Coetzee¹ and Christiaan Bezuidenhout²**

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to focus on victim empathy advancement components in correctional programmes offered in Youth Correctional Centres. It is postulated that youth sex offenders display empathy deficits, but only a limited number of international studies have investigated these deficits. This is problematic, as intervention programmes frequently include victim empathy advancement components without sufficient empirical support to necessitate such inclusion. In a recent study conducted by Coetzee (2015), an existing measuring instrument, namely Beckett and Fisher's Victim Empathy Distortion Scale was used to measure and compare 96 youth sex offenders' empathy levels for sexual abuse victims in general as portrayed in a case study, as well as empathy for the offenders' own specific victims (thus measuring the difference in each offender's empathy levels for sexual abuse victims in general, and for their own victim). The quantitative research results indicate that the most prominent empathy deficits are displayed towards the youth sex offenders' own victims. This finding was supported by the responses gained from the interviews with participants during the qualitative phase of the study. The findings in the quantitative and qualitative section of the research elucidates the importance of focussing on own victim empathy in correctional programmes offered to these youths in order to assist them to understand the impact of their offending behaviour, to take responsibility for their offending behaviour, and to reduce the possibility that they will recidivate.

Keywords: *Victim; victim empathy; youth sex offender; youth sex offending; Youth Correctional Centres; empathy deficits; correctional programmes; intervention programmes; recidivism; rehabilitation.*

INTRODUCTION

A prerequisite for positive change in offenders is that their attitude and behaviour must be modified. For this change to take effect, offenders should realise and understand that their behaviour and actions were wrong, and they need to feel remorse. Once this happens, the beginning of a process of positive change within the individual may occur (Bezuidenhout, 2007: 50). Even though no official statistics pertaining to the recidivism rate after release from a correctional facility in South Africa (SA) is available, some estimate it to be as high as 95 percent (Quan-Baffour & Zawada, 2012: 73). During 2013 the then Minister of Correctional Services, Sbu Ndebele, stated that South Africa has the highest prison population in Africa and "currently ranked ninth in the world in terms of prison population, with approximately 160 000 inmates" (SAPA, 2013). The value of rehabilitation can, therefore, not be emphasised enough, and thus issues such as positive change and empathy building are of elevated importance in South African correctional facilities (Coetzee, 2015: 2; Coetzee & Bezuidenhout, 2016: 20).

Offenders must understand the impact of their offending on victims, have empathy towards their victims, and accept responsibility for the offences they committed. Furthermore, they must be willing to alter their behaviour to such an extent that re-offending will not occur (Koss, Bachar & Hopkins, 2006: 351). According to Beech and Fisher (2002: 209), a reduced likelihood of repeat offending is associated with an increase in empathy for the offender's own specific victim. Braithwaite (2003: 320) states that when offenders internalise the shame and

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realisation of the consequential harm of their deeds it will prevent them from re-offending, which implies that offenders are rehabilitated.

Before exploring the importance of victim empathy advancement programmes in Youth Correctional Centres (YCCs) as a possible step in the process of positive change within an individual, it is essential to define a few concepts to clarify the meanings they will carry in this article.

DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

For the purpose of this article, a 'youth sex offender' implies a male youth younger than 25 years who has sexually violated another individual (this includes acts of sexual assault and/or rape). The operational definition was formulated by the authors by combining aspects of the definitions provided by Booyens, Beukman and Bezuidenhout (2013: 37) and the *White Paper on Corrections* (Department of Correctional Services, 2005: np). The *White Paper* indicates that a youth or young offender is classified as an offender between the age of 18 and 25-years-old. A 'victim' is defined as any individual who is harmed or violated and suffers physically and/or emotionally due to illegal and/or non-consented sexual conduct, including acts of sexual assault and/or rape committed by an offender or offenders (Coetzee 2015: 5; Coetzee & Bezuidenhout, 2016: 11).

'Empathy' is defined as the capacity to distinguish the emotional state of another individual (emotion recognition), to see situations from another individual's perspective (perspective-taking), to vicariously replicate observed emotions of another individual (emotional replication), and to respond appropriately within the given context, also known as the response decision (Marshall, Hudson, Jones & Fernandez, 1995: 101; Marshall & Marshall, 2011: 747; Coetzee, 2015: 5; Coetzee & Bezuidenhout, 2016: 11).

Adding to the definition of empathy provided above, the following six elements of empathy were identified (Carich, Metzger, Baig & Harper, 2003:62):

- Emotional recognition, which refers to the ability to recognise one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others;
- Victim harm recognition, which involves the ability to recognise and acknowledge the harm inflicted upon the victim;
- Assuming responsibility, which refers to offenders' ability to accept responsibility for their offending behaviour, without displaying cognitive distortions;
- Perspective-taking, which involves the ability of offenders to identify with their victims and to understand the impact of their offences on their victims;
- Guilt responses, which entail that the offender should feel remorseful. Thus, he/she should identify and share the victim's emotional state; and
- Emotional expression, which refers to offenders' ability to experience the emotional expression of the victim's pain and the impact that the offence had on the victim.

These concepts stand central to this contribution and will be used throughout the discussion.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Effective crime control and management of misbehaviour should ideally enable individuals to comprehend the consequences of their actions on fellow human beings (Naudé & Prinsloo, 2003: 1). Even though it has been postulated that youth sex offenders can be characterised as humans with empathy deficits, few studies have investigated these deficits (Varker & Devilly, 2007: 139). Intervention programmes frequently include victim empathy components without sufficient empirical support to justify such inclusion (Burke, 2001:224). Varker and Devilly (2007: 139) state that a nationwide survey in the United States of America (USA) showed that 94 percent of the intervention programmes for male sex offenders had an empathy training component.

There is a dearth of knowledge concerning victim empathy of youth sex offenders (Varker & Devilly 2007: 139), especially within the South African context. Due to the diverse multi-cultural context of South African society, there is a need to undertake research within the South African society in order to make specific recommendations that are applicable to the South African context (Coetzee, 2015: 11; Coetzee & Bezuidenhout, 2016: 11). The different social intricacies and multi-cultural beliefs and ethnicities, as well as the socio-economic circumstances in South Africa make the South African context unique. The political history and the culture of violence in South Africa could also have an impact on the lives of many youths and consequently their level of empathy and respect for others. This necessitates the expanding and/or developing of victim empathy advancement programmes in YCCs in order to assist youth sex offenders to understand the impact of their offending behaviour and to take responsibility for their offending behaviour.

EMPATHY ADVANCEMENT IN INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES

Intervention programmes should be restructured to focus on specific issues, such as the guidance or redirection of youth sex offenders. A study by Reitzel and Carbonell (2006: 413) revealed that a statistically significant difference exists between the sexual recidivism rates of youth sex offenders who participated in intervention programmes compared to those who did not participate. They found that the recidivism rate for youth sex offenders who participated in intervention programmes was 7.37 percent compared to 18.93 percent for youth sex offenders who did not participate. Thus, the abovementioned research indicates the importance of intervention programmes for youth sex offenders. Furthermore, it was found that instilling empathy in offenders, who participate in intervention programmes, usually reduces the expression of aggression and substitutes antagonistic responses with socially acceptable behaviour (Marshall et al, 1995: 100).

The majority of intervention programmes for sexual offenders have an empathy component (Beech & Fisher, 2002: 209; Brown, Harkins & Beech, 2012: 411; Burke, 2001: 224; Hanson, 2003: 13; Hanson & Scott, 1995: 260; Mann & Barnett, 2013: 282; Regehr & Glancy, 2001: 150; Webster, 2002: 281), since various researchers have concluded that sexual offenders lack empathy for their victims (Maletzky, 1991; Marshall et al, 1995; Pithers, 1994; Regehr & Glancy, 2001; Webster, 2002; Varker & Devilly, 2007; Williams & Finkelhor, 1990). Furthermore, Marshall et al. (1995: 99) postulate that sexual offenders' ability to experience empathy plays an important role in the development and maintenance of their misbehaviour. Pithers (1999: 258) agrees that the developing of empathy for victims is imperative, since the increasing of empathy could reduce recidivism, as well as enhance and maintain the offender's motivation to change. Brown et al. (2012: 421) concur with this statement. In contrast to the above-mentioned arguments, Hanson and Bussière (1998: 358) found no link between low levels of empathy for victims and sexual offending recidivism. This was supported by later research conducted by Hanson and Morton-Bourgon (2005). The aforementioned finding that no link exists between low levels of empathy for victims and

sexual offending recidivism (Hanson & Bussière, 1998: 358; Hanson and Morton-Bourgon, 2005) gave rise to speculations amongst some scholars that victim empathy components within sex offender intervention programmes may not be warranted. However, according to Mann and Barnett (2013: 289), there are limitations to the study conducted by Hanson and Morton-Bourgon (2005), especially pertaining to the definitions and measurements of empathy employed in their research. Furthermore, Mann and Barnett (2013: 295) postulate that the theoretical basis for a victim empathy component in sex offending intervention programmes is inconsistently articulated, poorly understood and lacks empirical testing to verify its value. According to them, “it is unclear whether or how current victim empathy treatment interventions, which usually focus on developing empathy for a past victim, generalise to future situations.” In addition, they claim that there is no evidence that poor victim empathy is a predictor of recidivism, or that programmes addressing victim empathy actually reduce recidivism. They conclude by saying that even though empirical evidence in favour of the rehabilitative quality of victim empathy intervention programmes are weak, it would be premature to conclude that victim empathy interventions are irrelevant or harmful. Thus, they are of the opinion that some components of victim empathy should be retained in intervention programmes, but that it should be approached with caution. In addition, they emphasise that victim empathy training should be presented in a manner that respects the dignity and human rights of offenders.

Empathy components within intervention programmes for sexual offenders normally entail techniques to improve offenders’ understanding of their victims’ experience. This can be achieved by using a strategy such as role-play, during which the sexual offenders play the role of their victims in order to attain some idea of what their victims experienced when the sexual violation took place. Furthermore, the re-enactment of the sexual offence may have a similar effect to that of aversion therapy, since the role-play can be traumatic for the offender who is the actor in the role-play, especially if he perceives the scenario as realistic. The negative emotions and trauma experienced during the role-play can have an inhibitory effect on the violent sexual fantasies that the offender had prior to the intervention. It must, however, be noted that the re-enactment approach should be used with caution since it is an intrusive intervention and the effectiveness of this approach in victim empathy enhancement is uncertain (Webster, Bowers, Mann & Marshall, 2005: 65).

Another method that is sometimes included in victim empathy intervention programmes is the so called ‘victim letter task’, where offenders write letters to their victims. In most instances, the writing of the letter is a hypothetical exercise, since the letters are not sent to the victims, but are used to ascertain whether offenders are displaying empathy towards the victims, and to assess the level of empathy, as well as offenders’ understanding of the emotions experienced by their victims (Webster, 2002: 282). However, if offenders are forced to face the harm that they caused their victims too early in the intervention programme (writing an open letter to the victim), it might lead to increased victim blaming instead of increasing an offender’s own victim empathy. This can be explained by the hypothesis that offenders have a negative self-image and during the early phases of the intervention programme, they are not yet ready to accommodate further unconstructive messages pertaining to themselves. Thus, they can only be confronted with the impact that their offence had on the victim, when they have accumulated personal resources and emotional resilience to enable them to deal with the understanding of the harm that they have caused (Beech & Fisher, 2002: 210; Marshall & Marshall, 2011: 749).

Should certain offenders suffer from psychopathy or have a callous attitude towards their victims, these cases can be addressed by intervention programmes where the victim is personalised in a manner that offenders can relate to, such as asking them to imagine that the victim is someone they care for (Marshall & Marshall, 2011: 749). According to Hanson (2003:

21), intervention programmes for youth sex offenders should focus on three primary components. The first component is perspective-taking skills, which implies that the offender should be educated on aspects such as the correct identification and appropriate labelling of emotions displayed by others, as well as the appropriate way to respond to the observations. The second component entails that offenders should be taught how to cope with the perceived distress of others. This could be achieved by teaching offenders to react to their own offending behaviour with guilt feelings instead of using techniques such as denial or victim blaming to disguise their feelings of shame. The last component refers to the development of caring relationships. A good place to start harnessing caring relationships is by focussing on offenders' feelings towards those that they already care about, for example, family members or friends. Once the value of these relationships is established, attention could be given to adversarial relationships with their victims, or the police, for instance.

A huge challenge with therapeutic intervention is that some youth sex offenders have sadistic psychopathic tendencies. This implies that they have no insight in their actions and do not have regret, remorse or empathy, and are actually stimulated by the suffering of their victim. When treating youth sex offenders one has to be cognisant of the fact that some of those who have sadistic tendencies might, however, be able to successfully engage in perspective-taking. In addition, they might recognise the distress of the victim as well. Being aware of the distress experienced by the victim could, however, enhance their desire to offend, especially if the affective aspects of their empathic ability are not on par, (i.e. their reaction to the victim's perceived distress). Therefore, intervention programmes should place specific emphasis on the enhancement of affective components, such as the reaction of offenders to the victim's perceived distress (Farr, Brown & Beckett, 2004: 164).

Based on the research discussed above, it is evident that intervention programmes, aimed at improving the general empathy of sexual offenders, might not be of any value if own victim empathy is not addressed as well. According to Fernandez and Marshall (2003: 22) intervention programmes that focus on addressing sexual offenders' general empathy levels (empathy directed towards all people and situations), or even on general victims of sexual abuse, may be wasting valuable time. The focus of an intervention programme must be on sexual offenders' own victim empathy deficits, as that is the area in which the most prominent empathy deficits occur (Brown et al, 2012: 425). This statement concurs with evidence pertaining to the empathy level toward an own victim from various studies (Fernandez & Marshall, 2003; Fernandez, Marshall, Lightbody & O'Sullivan, 1999; Fisher, Beech & Browne, 1999; Varker & Devilly, 2007). In addition, Brown et al. (2012: 421) postulate that intervention programmes with a victim-specific empathy component influences offenders' appreciation of the impact of their transgression on their victim.

It is also important to note that specific intervention models should be developed to address deviant sexual behaviour in adolescents. In many instances, adult intervention models are used with minimal or no adaptations aimed at meeting the developmental phase of the adolescent. Considering the fact that research has shown distinct differences between adult sex offenders and youth sex offenders, this is of paramount importance. As adolescence can be seen as a time of transition, early and effective intervention strategies in all spheres of life are essential to prevent subsequent criminal behaviour. Thus, it is assumed that if a youth who displays inappropriate sexual behaviour is identified early by a teacher or other socialising agents and, if intervention in the case of criminal behaviour (e.g. diversion programmes or correctional programmes in the case of incarceration) occurs swiftly, the likelihood of these youths maturing into adult offenders can be reduced (Thakker, Ward & Tidmarsh, 2006: 313). The authors acknowledge that some international researchers claim that recidivism amongst youth sex offenders is lower than that of adult sex offenders. Some of the reasons provided for this notion are that youths cease their deviant activities as they become older and more mature,

while others postulate that it may be as a result of effective correctional programmes in YCCs. If the latter is true, this once again emphasises the importance of effective intervention programmes (Bartol & Bartol, 2011: 395).

Another important aspect that needs to be noted is that the most central feature of adolescence is the development of the self (Keenan, 2002: 5). In this regard, Thakker et al. (2006: 315) state that burdening young people with the idea that their offending persona is so fully developed, that they will have to exercise control over it for the rest of their adult lives, seems to defeat the purpose of intervention and treatment. Instead, the focus in intervention programmes should be on change and self-development. Using terminology such as 'youth sex offender' leads to the formation of an offender identity, instead of aiming to help the young person to form an identity that is detached from sexual offending. These researchers point out that referring to an adolescent as a sex offender amounts to labelling, which is counterproductive and harmful during the developmental phase of adolescence. They suggest referring to 'adolescents who sexually offend' instead of referring to an adolescent as a sex offender. A label can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy and can put a vicious circle in motion that causes more harm to the young person instead of contributing to their ability to distinguish between right and wrong. If they have an empathy deficit, and they do not have the ability to choose between right and wrong, they will most probably derail again.

With reference to the South African context, it serves to be noted that correctional programmes are compulsory for all sentenced offenders serving a sentence of 24 months and longer. Currently, eleven different correctional programmes are offered by the Department of Correctional Services (DCS). The correctional programme that is offered to sexual offenders detained in Correctional Centres is called the Preparatory Programme on Sexual Offences. The structure of the programme includes nine sessions focussing on the following (Department of Correctional Services, 2015b: np):

- Session 1: Introduction and orientation;
- Session 2: Possible causes of sexual offending;
- Session 3: Development of human beings (phases and the sexual response cycle);
- Session 4: Relevant definitions and legal implications;
- Session 5: Roles and identity (male vs. female);
- Session 6: Immediate precursors to sexual offending and possible coping strategies;
- Session 7: Consequences of crime;
- Session 8: Introduction to restorative justice; and
- Session 9: Relapse prevention.

One of the recommendations put forward by Hesselink-Louw and Schoeman (2003: 171) was that a multi-dimensional approach including psychologists, social workers, criminologists, educationalists and religious workers is imperative to effectively reform sex offenders. In addition, emphasis was placed on the importance of individualised assessment, counselling and correctional programmes for sex offenders. As stipulated in the Correctional Services Act 1998 (Act 111 of 1998), individual assessment of offenders is essential in order to develop individualised correctional programmes forming part of an individualised assessment plan. However, as stated by Herbig and Hesselink (2012: 30), the individualised treatment of offenders is not a given in practice, and a one size fits all approach is often the norm in South African corrections. This implies that the same programme is used regardless of the type of sexual offender (e.g. rapists, paedophiles, first time sex offenders, baby rapists, gang rapists, and youth sex offenders) (Hesselink & Bezuidenhout, 2012: 253). The reason for

this one dimensional approach can possibly be attributed to aspects such as staff shortages in the DCS. This is highlighted by the 51 percent vacancy rate which was reported for psychologists and social workers in the 2010/2011 financial year, leading to caseloads of up to 3 000 inmates per staff member (Herbig and Hesselink, 2012: 30). Unfortunately, more up-to-date information pertaining to the current caseloads could not be obtained.

Before exploring the research results pertaining to victim empathy advancement programmes in YCCs it is important to provide an overview of the goal and the objectives of the study on which this article is based (Coetzee, 2015).

RESEARCH GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The overarching goal of the study was to measure, describe and compare the prevalence of victim empathy in youth sex offenders (Coetzee, 2015: 13; Coetzee & Bezuidenhout, 2016: 15).

Two types of victim empathy were measured in order to establish if youth sex offenders within the South African context display these types of empathy, namely:

- General sexual abuse victim empathy, which refers to empathy for victims of sexual abuse in general, for example a rape victim; and
- Own victim empathy, which refers to specific empathy towards the victim against whom the offender committed the crime (Coetzee, 2015: 12; Coetzee & Bezuidenhout, 2016).

One of the objectives was to provide recommendations with regard to the need for the inclusion or exclusion of victim empathy advancement components in intervention programmes aimed at rehabilitating youth sex offenders (Coetzee, 2015: 14). This objective is the focus of this article.

METHODOLOGY AND ETHICS

To attain the abovementioned goal, the combined qualitative and quantitative research approaches, also referred to as the mixed methods approach (Fouché & Delpont 2011: 63), was applied. Quantitative data was collected by means of an existing questionnaire (Beckett and Fisher's Victim Empathy Distortion Scale) and qualitative data was obtained by means of semi-structured interviews. The first author conducted all the interviews.

The triangulation mixed methods design was used, which implies that quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were applied, the data collection took place within the same period, and both methods were considered equally important. The two distinct, but in the case of this study complementary methodologies, each required its own research design. For the purpose of the quantitative section, the cross-sectional survey design was used, while the collective case study research design was used in the qualitative section of the study.

Pertaining to the sampling procedure, the authors made use of non-probability sampling and applied the purposive sampling method. This entails that each research participant is selected based on the unique position and traits of that individual. This means that purposive sampling may involve the inclusion of the entire population of a limited group or subset of a population (Bachman & Schutt 2003: 108). The sample consisted of 96 male youth sex offenders detained in Leeuwkop (situated in the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan area), Emthonjeni (situated in the Tshwane Metropolitan area) and Boksburg YCCs in the Gauteng Province of SA, who could understand and speak English, and were willing to participate in the study (Coetzee, 2015: 14; Coetzee & Bezuidenhout, 2016: 16).

It must be noted that ethical considerations were meticulously adhered to. A brief overview of some of the ethical aspects that were applicable to the study follows:

- Ethical clearance was granted by the University of Pretoria's Ethics Committee and by the DCS Research Committee;
- Informed consent and assent: Prior to the interviews, an informed consent form was signed by the head of the respective YCC who acts *in loco parentis* of detained children younger than 18 years. Additionally, an informed assent form was signed by research participants who were younger than 18 years. Research participants who were older than 18 years signed their own informed consent forms (Coetzee, 2015: 124; Coetzee & Bezuidenhout, 2016: 16); and
- Debriefing of participants: Upon completion of the data collection process, the researcher held individual debriefing sessions with the research participants by discussing their experiences and the way that the answering of the questionnaire and their participation in the interview impacted on them. If the research participants were negatively affected in any way, a social worker of the relevant YCC was at hand to provide trauma debriefing and/or counselling to the research participant concerned (Coetzee, 2015: 127; Coetzee & Bezuidenhout, 2016: 16).

With regard to the reliability of the quantitative data set, the researcher performed the Cronbach's Alpha test by means of SPSS and found that in the current study the internal reliability test revealed high reliability, Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$.

Pertaining to the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, methods such as data triangulation were used as data was gathered by means of two collection strategies, namely the completion of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews (Lietz & Zayas, 2010: 193). The data from these two collection strategies were contrasted to indicate trustworthiness. Triangulation of the data from the two data collection strategies showed significant trustworthiness.

An exposition of the empirical findings of the study on which this article is based follows.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

An overview of some of the quantitative and qualitative findings obtained in the study (Coetzee 2015) are provided below.

Quantitative results

The questionnaire (VEDS) measured the empathy levels of youth sex offenders on two levels, by means of a four point Likert scale. The first level focussed on their empathy for a general sexual abuse victim. The participants answered questions pertaining to a case study about a seven-year-old girl named Sarah, who was sexually abused by her 15-year-old brother. The second level of empathy related to the youth sex offender's own victim. The questions that were asked in the first section of the questionnaire focussing on the case study were repeated, but this time the participants had to apply it to their own victims and convey their feelings and thoughts regarding the specific person whom they victimised. In order to determine if a significant difference existed between the youth sex offenders' general victim empathy scores and the scores obtained for the own victim empathy section, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test (non-parametric test) was performed on SPSS. In the current study, a normal distribution was not attained, as determined by the Kolmogorov Smirnov test. The test result on the SPSS general sexual abuse empathy scores, $D(94) = 0.14$, $p < .05$, and the own victim empathy scores, $D(94) = 0.11$, $p < .05$ were both significantly non-normal. The abnormal distribution can be attributed to the fact that due to the heterogeneous nature of the research participants in this study, there were both very high and very low empathy scores, and thus a normal distribution

in the data was not attainable. This, as well as the fact that a non-probability sampling technique was used in this study, necessitated the use of a non-parametric test. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank test is conducted in situations where there are two sets of scores to compare, and these scores come from the same research participants (Field, 2009: 552). The test indicated that the youth sex offenders in this study had significantly less victim empathy for their own victim ($M=89.17/120$) than for a general sexual abuse victim ($M=100.84/120$). Thus, a significant difference exists between own victim empathy levels and general sexual abuse victim empathy levels in youth sex offenders who participated in this study (Coetzee, 2015: 136).

It must be noted that 70 of the participants measured lower levels of empathy for their own victims when compared to the empathy that they displayed towards the general sexual abuse victim in the case study. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that only 31 of the participants' empathy levels measured below 80 percent for the general sexual abuse victim empathy section. In addition, the participants' average empathy score for the general sexual abuse victim was 84 percent ($100.8/120$) with a minimum score of 48 percent and a maximum score of 99 percent. On the other hand, 55 of the participants' empathy levels for their own specific victim measured below 80 percent and the average empathy score for the participants' own victims was 74 percent ($89.17/120$) with a minimum score of 25.83 percent and a maximum score of 96.67 percent (Coetzee, 2015: 137).

In the following section, an overview of some of the qualitative results are provided.

Qualitative results

During the qualitative interviews, some of the responses by the participants in the quantitative section of the research were echoed. One of the themes that were identified in the qualitative section is elaborated upon below.

Victim empathy in youth sex offenders	
Theme 3: Correctional programmes in YCCs	Sub-theme 3.1: Attendance of programmes. Sub-theme 3.2: Inclusion of victim empathy components in the programmes attended.

The research participants were probed about their involvement in, and attendance of, correctional programmes in the YCCs where they were incarcerated. An overview of some of the comments regarding the correctional programmes that are offered in the respective centres, as well as their views pertaining to the inclusion of empathy components in correctional programmes are provided in the next section.

Sub-theme 3.1: Attendance of programmes

A number of participants expressed appreciation for the intervention programmes that are presented in the YCCs, while only a few indicated that the programmes did not focus on aspects they deemed important (Coetzee, 2015: 187). With regards to the influence that the programmes, as well as the YCC in general had on them, some of the research participants gave insightful responses. One of these responses was that crime does not pay and that one must use one's hands and mind to generate money. Some research participants expressed gratitude for what the YCC had done for them, as they were of the opinion that they were now improved individuals as a result of their incarceration. In addition, a few participants opined that their incarceration had a purpose, and that they found solace in religion. Some of the participants were of the opinion that they had reached their full potential in the YCC upon discovering that they had hidden talents such as the ability to write poems or create artworks, be a motivational speaker or a peer educator. To concur with this some of their quotes are provided next.

RP 18 replied that: *“In prison everyone must do Sex Offender programme. If I had a choice, I would still do it.”*

RP 29 elaborated: *“There is a course for sex offenders. They teach us about sexual offences. They are showing us the importance of females. Most of the time we think they are not like us. I learnt that we all have something in common; we want to feel safe and loved. If the girl says no, I mustn't force myself into her.”*

RP 13 said: *“The Sexual Offender programme taught us different types of abuses and rape. We talked about how the victim feels. We didn't talk about relationships.”*

RP 16 stated that: *“There should be more activities during the programmes in prison. We just sit in the class and listen to a story book. They have to preach less, it leads to resistance.”*

RP 48 said: *“Life is not easy, but once we truly accept it and work on towards it then life is no longer difficult. Life is not about money, not about what you wear not about pure pula (be a famous person in the location). Crime is not the way that you can make money. There is lot of ways to make money with our hands and minds. Tell the people outside they must not learn from their own mistakes, learn from other's mistakes. I don't want other youths to mess up their future. I left school Grade 7 but today because of prison I have N5 certificate, N2 Electricity (Level 1 and 2), Level 1 and 2 Computer literacy, Substance Abuse programme, Anger Management, Sexual Behaviour programme, New Beginning programme. I've won a certificate in poetry. I motivate people, all of the inmates. I accepted God as my Christ and saviour in prison. Now I'm ready to face the world. I've disappointed my family. I just want to build trust up. All of the other younger ones smoke nyaope and slip out of school. I must provide for them, so that the siblings coming at the back of me will know the right things to choose at life. I thank the prison for what they've done to me. I'm a better person. My family is so very happy. Last week I went to parole board. I haven't done even a year. After eight months I am going out. I even know English. I realised that life is not about me.”*

RP 91 gave the following version of the impact that the YCC had on him: *“For me to be in prison, it made me come to my senses and realise I'm not the person I thought I was. I found God and he made me realise that I'm not here to do bad things, I'm here to win souls for him. I'm not saying it's nice to be in prison, but I have time to meditate. I was involved in gangsterism, but I've realised it is holding me back from reaching my goal. If you give yourself to God, he forgives us. I gave him all my sins. He said come to me and cast all your burdens. He gave me the lightest weight.”*

On the other hand, a few participants felt indifferent about the programmes and indicated that they only attend them, due to their awareness of the fact that the parole board requires attendance of intervention programmes. Some of their quotes are provided next.

RP 71 said: *“Sex programme is a must for the parole board, also Life Skills and Anger Management*

RP 86 replied: *“Only did New Beginning. I want to go to other programmes because it will help in Parole Board and they will see you changed and you won't make another crime.”*

The views of the research participants with regards to the inclusion of victim empathy components in the correctional programmes are provided in the next section.

Sub-theme 3.2: Inclusion of victim empathy components in the programmes attended

Research participants were asked if the programmes that they attended focussed on victims and the impact that sexual offences have on them. Furthermore, the researcher enquired if they were of the opinion that it was important to have programmes with such a focus. Next, some of their comments are provided:

RP 6 mentioned: *“Programmes must teach us how the rape affects the victim’s life. If they did something to my sister how would I feel?”*

RP 35 said: *“We need Victim Offender Dialogue. I want to speak to the victim to get the truth out there. I want to apologise to show the victim that she should be honest.”*

RP 51 replied: *“I did Anger Management where they teach about victims, how to treat anger because anger made us commit these crimes.”*

RP 52 responded: *“I went to Life skills, Anger Management, Sexual Offence programme where we did victim empathy. We debate topic of rape. Why it happens. Talk about our own story. We are 20 in a group. There is not a lot of time, not everyone gets a chance.”*

RP 53 stated: *“I did programmes like Family Tree, New Beginning. Talking about rapes, doing drugs, peer pressure, victims, how you get in trouble, nothing about empathy.”*

RP 56 conveyed: *“The Sex Offender programme included victims but I can’t remember what.”*

RP 58 explained the content of the Sex Offender programme he attended as follows: *“I attended many programmes. I never talked about my case in the Sex Offender programme. Only social worker knows. In the programme we talked about how victims in general feel, how they would feel if they saw you. We use newspaper and talk about how the victims feel and how we feel. Some talked about their own victims as well.”*

RP 61 shared: *“I made many programmes, nothing focussing on the victim.”*

RP 64 described: *“Life Skills said something about victim but I can’t remember. Since I’ve applied for Dialogue, the victim has passed away. What must I do know?”*

RP 65 emphasised: *“Programmes are helpful. Anger Management helped me a lot, taught me how to control my anger. No programme directly spoke about the victim.”*

RP 75 disclosed: *“The Sex Offence programme, our social worker talks about victims and we write a letter to victim. I also attended psychologist. I also wrote letter to victim and letter back from victim to me. I registered for VOD.”*

RP 76 reiterated: *“Nothing about victims. More about me, how to start new life, self-image, self-awareness, respect for others.”*

RP 81 elaborated: *“In New Beginnings and Sex Offender programme we looked at victims. What causes us to commit crime and what can we do not to commit crime again.”*

Most of the participants indicated that the Sex Offender Programmes (SOP) that they attended did not have an empathy component and did not focus on the influence that rape had on the victim. Only a small number of respondents in the current study indicated that the SOP that they attended focussed on the victim and victim empathy. However, it was clear from their explanations that the main focus was on general sexual abuse victim empathy, and not on own victim empathy. Furthermore, some of the participants acknowledged the importance of victim empathy components in intervention programmes as they explained that they were not aware of the impact that their offending behaviour would have on the victim. Additionally, they expressed the need for involvement in restorative justice initiatives such as Victim Offender Dialogues (VODs), where they can apologise to their victims. However, it serves to be noted that a number of these participants wanted to have a discussion with their victims in order to get them to acknowledge that they consented to the sexual act, and were willing participants. Thus, these participants' main focus was not to ask for forgiveness and take responsibility for the offence, or to make amends, but instead they wanted to ensure that the victim is partly blamed for the incident and the aftermath thereof (Coetzee, 2015: 224).

Some raised the fact that the correctional programmes were held in groups of approximately 20 members, and that there is insufficient time for everyone to participate. A noteworthy number of the research participants who said that they focussed on victims in the SOP said that they usually talked about victims in general and about how these victims probably experienced the sexual offence. They indicated that the facilitators in the group interventions used newspaper articles to facilitate the discussion, and some of the research participants sporadically were given the opportunity to discuss their own victim's feelings. It is commendable that some facilitators focus on victims of sexual abuse. The limitation is, however, that most of the focus is on general victim empathy and not on own victim empathy. It should be taken into account that some of the youth sex offenders are not willing to discuss the particulars of their offences in a group setting, since they are scared of retaliation, especially if they committed an offence against a young child. This complicates matters, since a group setting might not be the best scenario to address own victim empathy. Constrained resources, however, makes individual therapy sessions for incarcerated youth sex offenders problematic (Coetzee, 2015: 189).

It must be noted that during the interviews the first author became aware of the fact that many research participants refused to use the concept 'victim' and referred to the 'complainant' in their case. This might be an indication of an avoidance of accountability or responsibility by the offenders. In addition, it might be indicative of a refusal to acknowledge the harm that they caused to the victims in their cases by distancing themselves from the concept 'victim', since that would imply that they were the victimiser. Considering the results of the current study, as well as literature pertaining to the subject, it is clear that programmes should focus on own victim empathy. Programmes should, therefore, be developed to specifically include the victim and address the sexual attack of the relevant offender, as that is where the most prominent deficits were displayed in the current, as well as previous studies focussing on victim empathy (Coetzee, 2015:189; Fernandez & Marshall, 2003; Fernandez et al, 1999; Fisher et al, 1999; Varker & Devilly, 2007). According to Fernandez and Marshall (2003:22), intervention programmes that focus on addressing sexual offenders' general empathy levels (empathy directed towards all people and situations) or even on sexual abuse victims in general may be ineffective as the current study showed that the own victim empathy should be the focus when intervention takes place with these sex offenders.

Even though it is obvious that SOPs presented in the YCCs do have an empathy component, it is evident that most of the focus is on general sexual abuse victim empathy. Considering the fact that the research participants' average empathy score for general sexual abuse victims was 84 percent, it is reasonable to deduce that, in general, they do not have general sexual abuse victim empathy deficits. However, a significant difference exists between their scores for the general sexual abuse victim and their own victim. Thus, own victim empathy is where the focus of intervention programmes should be. It is assumed that if youth sex offending is identified at an early stage, and if intervention occurs swiftly, chances of these juveniles becoming adult offenders can be minimised (Thakker et al, 2006:313). However, Ward and Beech's (2006:40) concern should be noted. They opine that in the presence of situational reinforcers or triggers such as the use of substances, it will be more difficult to experience empathy and comprehend the impact of the offence. This coupled with sexual arousal make it less likely that the offender will refrain from offending when they are in the presence of the victim. Furthermore, Ward and Beech (2006:40) are unsure if post-offence empathy will inhibit recidivism. This notion is underscored in the results of the study on which this article is based (Coetzee, 2015). Even though some of the research participants indicated that they felt empathy for their victims once they had sobered up, or once they were removed from a situation of peer pressure, the situational reinforcer such as being under the influence of a substance numbed their feelings and inhibited the display of empathy prior to, as well as during, the committing of the sexual offence. However, this does not mean that focussing on own victim empathy in intervention programmes will not have a positive influence on the offenders who were not aware of the impact of their actions on the victim.

A number of recommendations pertaining to the advancement of victim empathy in youth sex offenders, are explicated on a primary, secondary and tertiary level, follow below (Coetzee, 2015:229).

RECOMMENDATIONS PERTAINING TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF VICTIM EMPATHY IN YOUTH SEX OFFENDERS

Primary level

It is suggested that awareness campaigns should sensitise and inform community members pertaining to what constitutes healthy sexual interactions that are consensual and respectful. It is imperative that leaders and important role-players within communities will take responsibility for sensitising community members to the impact that deviant sexual behaviour can have on other individuals. The importance of leaders in the communities, as well as guardians of children, leading by example, cannot be stressed enough.

Secondary level

Information pertaining to the prevalence of rape myths and cognitive distortions pertaining to inappropriate sexual behaviour, as well as the impact that sexual offences have on victims, should be included in the life orientation curricula in schools. This is essential, as youths need to be equipped with the afore-mentioned knowledge, as it might inhibit deviant sexual behaviour. The youth sex offenders that participated in this study acknowledged that they were not aware of, or fully realised the impact their actions had on victims. They also insisted that they derived the largest proportion of their sexual education and knowledge base from the media (mainly television). This is especially worrisome if one takes into account that an association between watching violence on television and then acting it out in a real life situation has been verified by research (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:374). In addition, it was mentioned by various participants that they did not have a father figure, or any other family member who shared with them the value of an 'appropriate' relationship. This is problematic, as these

children might receive warped ideas of healthy sexual development and healthy intimate relationships from other sources of information. In the absence of proper sex education provided by parents, children often have to rely on the information received via the mass media and what they hear from friends. This may perpetuate acceptance of sex myths and the belief that certain inappropriate and/or harmful sexual acts are acceptable, and even condoned by society.

Victim empowerment strategies such as awareness campaigns pertaining to high-risk situations that can give rise to victimisation should receive attention. It is imperative to sensitise community members with regard to their victimisation vulnerability in different social situations. When taking into account that many of the participating offenders referred to scenarios where both the offender and the victim attended parties or went to bars or taverns, became intoxicated, and engaged in sexual interactions, thus emphasises the ensuing victimisation vulnerability in these situations.

Tertiary prevention

Individual counselling sessions, focussing on the harnessing of own victim empathy is the ideal in any treatment programme focusing on youth sex offenders. Given the lack of DCS resources impacting negatively on the viability of individual counselling sessions for each youth sex offender, group counselling is the only viable alternative. The DCS can, therefore, consider group counselling sessions focussing on own victim empathy enhancement. Often individuals in a group setting discover the impact of their behaviour, and that their behaviour is not as adaptive or in line with mainstream norms as he would like it to be. Group counselling can often help the sex offender identify their own misbehaviour and the overall context and impact thereof. Increased use of certain strategies, such as the victim letter task, should also be considered within the group counselling sessions to enhance offenders' understanding of the detrimental effects of their misbehaviour and the impact that it had on their victims.

CONCLUSION

It is worrisome to know that a number of youth sex offenders justify their behaviour and often blame the context or situation for their deviant behaviour. In addition, many youth sex offenders are morally and cognitively removed from the sexual crimes, which they committed. Additionally, their ignorance pertaining to the impact of their offences on their victims is a cause for concern. This highlights the need to adapt current correctional programmes in YCCs to ensure that offenders take responsibility for their actions and realise the detrimental effects of their behaviour. This is imperative, since offenders should be held accountable for their offending behaviour. Moreover, a prerequisite for positive change in offenders is that their attitude and behaviour must be modified. In this regard, in the foreword of the 2013/2014 Department of Correctional Services' annual report, the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, Advocate Michael Masuthu, stated the following: "Remorse, regret, reconciliation and rehabilitation are cornerstones for the successful reintegration of offenders back into communities."

Considering the results of the study on which this article is based, as well as literature pertaining to the subject, it is clear that intervention programmes should focus on own victim empathy, since this is where the most prominent deficits are displayed. If individual specialised intervention is not viable and group counselling is the only option, strategies such as the victim letter task should be employed to shift the focus to the impact of the offending behaviour on the offenders' own victims. Therapeutic interventions should aim to teach and instil empathy and a moral compass that steer them away from maladaptive sexual behaviours. A popular quote by Bill Drayton, an American social entrepreneur, underlines this notion: "We have to teach empathy as we do literacy" (Drayton, 2011).

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