

**Sex Offenders' Perceptions of the Police and Courts:
Are There Spill-Over Effects?**

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The authors would like to thank three anonymous peer reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this manuscript. This research was supported by an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant (LP0668287) in partnership with Queensland Corrective Services. The views expressed herein are solely those of the authors, and in no way reflect the views or policies of Australian Research Council or Queensland Corrective Services. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Sarah Brown, Centre for Advances in Behavioural Science, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, Coventry University, Priory Street, Coventry, UK, CV1 5FB; email: sarah.brown@coventry.ac.uk.

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Abstract

Individuals convicted of sexual offenses are rarely asked their views of the police and courts. The aims of this study were to examine the impact of feelings of guilt on perceptions of the police and police interview outcomes, and spill-over effects from perceptions of the police to perceptions of the courts. Participants were 116 adult males incarcerated for sexual offenses who were invited to report their perceptions of police interviewers, feelings at the time of interview, interview outcomes, and perceptions of the court process. Feelings of guilt were related to perceptions of the police. Both feelings of guilt and perceptions of the police were associated with interview outcomes. Spill-over effects were found as perceptions of the police were directly related to perceptions of the courts. The findings highlight the important role of police officers as gatekeepers to the criminal justice system, with associated implications for police officers' training and practice.

Keywords: sex offenders' perceptions; police interviews; courts; procedural justice; spill-over effects

Sex Offenders' Perceptions of the Police and Courts: Are there Spill-Over Effects?

Examining the perceptions of service users is important as they have unique and valuable perspectives that can be used to inform service delivery. Hence, such information is routinely reviewed in many areas of health and social care practice. This tends not to be a feature of justice systems, and the perspectives of offenders are frequently overlooked. In particular, offenders have rarely been asked to assess the police and courts (Baker et al., 2014). This is despite there being a strong relationship between offenders' perceptions of the legitimacy of criminal sanctions and recidivism (Kinsey, 1992; Makkai & Braithwaite, 1991; Paternoster, Brachman, Brame, & Sherman, 1997; Tyler, 1990), and links between trust in authority and subsequent cooperative behavior (Tyler & Murphy, 2011). That is, positive offender perceptions of sanctions are associated with increased compliance (Paternoster et al., 1997; Williams & Hawkins, 1992) and perceptions of unfairness, ineffectiveness, or inappropriate administration are related to increased crime (Petersilia & Deschenes, 1994; Sherman, 1993; Sherman & Berk, 1984).

According to Tyler and Murphy (2011), when individuals feel that authority figures are benevolent and caring they react more positively than when they believe the opposite. Tyler (2005), for example, established that New Yorkers' trust and confidence in the police was a predictor of willingness to cooperate with them. Paternoster et al. (1997) found that when police officers arrested suspects of intimate partner violence (IPV) in a procedurally fair manner, the rate of subsequent IPV was lower than when they were not perceived to have acted fairly. Furthermore, many procedural justice studies have shown that individuals react positively when they perceive that authority figures have behaved neutrally (i.e., such that decisions are consistent, fair and based on facts, rather than biases or personal opinions) and they value opportunities to present their perspectives to authority figures (Murphy, Mazzerole, & Bennett, 2014). Individuals, it appears, are particularly sensitive to

signs that they are being responded to with dignity and respect (see Murphy et al., 2014; Tyler, 1990).

Despite there being a longstanding recognition by some (e.g., Day, 1999) that sex offenders' perspectives provide a valuable insight into the rehabilitative responses designed for them, the views of participants have been researched in only a small proportion of sex offender treatment programs (SOTPs) (Day, 1999; Drapeau, Korner, Brunet, & Granger, 2004; Drapeau, Korner, Granger, & Brunet, 2005; Garret, Oliver, Wilcox, & Middleton, 2003; Levenson, Macgowan, Morin, & Cotter, 2009; Levenson & Prescott, 2009; Levenson, Prescott, & Amora, 2010; Marques, Day, Nelson, & Miner, 1989; Marques, Day, Nelson, Miner, & West, 1991; Williams, 2004). Participants have generally expressed satisfaction with SOTPs, a finding that is consistent across a range of treatment locations and settings. Therapist qualities and therapeutic relationships are particularly influential in these perceptions (Drapeau et al., 2005; Williams, 2004).

There is also growing body of research concerning perspectives of sex offender registries (for an overview, see Tewksbury & Lees, 2007), with some examining the perspectives of registrants (Brannon, Levenson, Fortney, & Baker, 2007; Murphy & Fedoroff, 2013; Tewksbury, 2005; Tewksbury & Lees, 2007; Zevitz & Farkas, 2000a, b). In these studies many respondents felt that registries and/or notification were unfair. This is perhaps related to feelings that they have no voice. In other studies (Chan, Homes, Murray, & Treanor, 2010; Kemshall, Dominey, & Hilder, 2012), some participants expressed concern about unfairness, as disclosure could be made regardless of the type of sexual offense for which an individual had been convicted and the length of time they were required to be on the register were seen to be unfair. A lack of opportunity to challenge the system was also noted. For some, a lack of confidence in police and probation in making fair and accurate risk assessments was linked to a lack of confidence in the scheme, though some interviewees clearly had good relationships with the police officers responsible for their oversight.

Other than these published service user views, little research has been conducted on the way in which sex offenders perceive their sanctions and their interactions with the police and the courts. Due to the nature of their crimes, sex offenders are a group that may be particularly impacted by interactions with the police, with the potential for spill-over effects to other aspects of the CJS. As perceptions of police behaviors potentially influence perceptions of all other aspects of the CJS, it is an important area of investigation.

Perceptions of the Police

Research on offenders' perceptions of, and encounters with, the police more broadly has focused on the concept of procedural justice, legitimacy, and cooperation; yet, these relationships are still not well understood (Mazerolle, Antrobus, Bennett, & Tyler, 2013). The impact of encounters with the police on perceptions of police legitimacy can be seen in the negative impact that stop-and-search actions have on views of legitimacy among young, black males in the USA (Gau & Brunson, 2010), who in another study (Hagan, Payne, & Shedd, 2005) reported the highest levels of procedural injustice. In a survey of violent offenders from Chicago, Papachristos, Meares, and Fagan (2013) found that while, on the whole, violent offenders had negative views of the law and legal authority, they were more likely to comply when they believed in the substance of the law and the legitimacy of the legal actors, especially the police.

Using survey data of contacts with, and evaluations of, the police in Chicago, Skogan (2006) found that a bad experience with the police could have a negative impact on suspects' views of legitimacy, with the impact of a bad experience being much larger than that of a positive experience. In fact, positive experiences seemed to have very little impact on generalized confidence in the police. This was partially supported by Bradford, Jackson, and Stanko (2009) using similar data from London (UK) where negative experiences had a greater effect than positive ones; however, they also showed that positive experiences could improve confidence. Using a randomized experimental

design, Mazerolle et al. (2013) revealed that motorists in Queensland (Australia) who thought that their encounters with the police had been procedurally just reported more positive views of the police, both generally and in relation to the specific incident. Thus, they did not support the survey data of Skogan (2006) and Bradford et al. (2009), showing instead that even short encounters could have a positive impact, and that legitimacy influenced willingness to cooperate with the police. Hence, they concluded that, "a little bit of being nice goes a long way" (p. 55). Paternoster et al. (1997) established that greater levels of perceived procedural justice exerted a significant 'recidivism inhibition effect' in IPV perpetrators that was comparable to that resulting from a favorable outcome (being warned, rather than arrested). Combined, these studies highlight the role that police encounters play in influencing perceptions of the police and other behavioral outcomes.

Sex offenders' views of their experiences with the police have rarely been examined in published empirical studies. Studies have shown that a humane, ethical approach is not always followed in police interviews with sex offenders, with displays of anger and disgust occurring in many police interviews with suspects of child sexual abuse (Oxburgh, Williamson, & Ost, 2006). In Holmberg and Christianson's (2002) study of 83 sex offenders' ratings of police officers' respect and kindness were lower compared to non-sex offenders. The extent to which police interviewers expressed positive attitudes, were friendly, cooperative, and made the offenders feel acknowledged and respected (collectively 'humanity') were associated with an increased likelihood of confession. Hostility, aggression, insulting, and condemning behavior (collectively 'dominance') had the converse effect (Holmberg & Christianson, 2002), which might be related to Gudjonsson's (1994) suggestion that hostile questioning could change intentions to confess through a process of psychological reactance. Anger and a sense of injustice were important components of a "boomerang" reaction to police pressure. Participants in Kebbell, Alison, Hurren, and Mazerolle's (2010) study thought that police officers in an ideal interview should have a more ethical approach

and display more humanity and less dominance than occurred in their own interviews. Individuals who confessed felt that their interviewers had expressed more humanity and less dominance and used a more ethical approach than those who denied the offenses under question, replicating the findings of an earlier vignette study with the same participants (Kebbell, Alison, & Hurren, 2008).

Feelings of Guilt

Decisions to confess or deny may also be related to offenders' feelings about their behaviors. When individuals are questioned by the police as suspects, they make decisions to confess to or deny the crimes under scrutiny by considering the likely consequences and probability of each alternative decision (Hilgendorf & Irving, 1981). A number of factors are related to these decisions (Gudjonsson & Petursson, 1991; Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 2000; Holmberg & Christianson 2002; Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2004; Leo, 1996), with the extent of the evidence against the suspect being a key factor. The most cited reason by Icelandic offenders for confessing to crimes, for example, was that they believed the police could prove their guilt (Gudjonsson & Petursson, 1991; Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 1999). In a UK study, Moston, Stephenson, and Williamson (1992) found that confessions occurred more frequently in cases where the suspects rated the evidence as strong (67% of cases) compared to when they rated the evidence as weak (less than 10% of cases).

The extent of feelings of guilt (and not just the police's ability to prove guilt) may also play a role in these decisions; yet, the link between feelings of guilt and police interview outcomes has rarely been examined. In a sample of adult males in a Canadian penitentiary convicted of a range of offenses, feelings of guilt were linked to a greater likelihood of confession (Deslauriers-Varin, Lussier, & St-Yves, 2011). In a survey conducted over a ten-year period of 624 sex offenders in a Canadian penitentiary, Beauregard and Mieczkowski (2012) showed that for child molesters, age at time of offense and feelings of guilt after the crime were significantly associated with a decision to confess. Gudjonsson and Sigurdsson (1999) found that sex offenders confessed more frequently than

other offenders because of a strong internal need to confess, with the likelihood of confession being linked to feelings of guilt. They reported that sexual abusers of children had a greater need to confess than sexual abusers of adults.

Perceptions of the Courts

Most studies do not specifically isolate the impact of experiences of the court from other linked encounters (e.g., with the police investigating the case). Tyler (1988) interviewed 652 citizens of Chicago who had had personal experiences with the police or courts in the previous year (47% had called the police for help, 31% had been stopped by the police, and 23% had been to court). In this study, the key determinant of respondents' reactions to these encounters was their assessments of the fairness of the procedures used. Once fairness was taken into account, there was little independent effect of the favorability of the court outcomes. Very similar findings were observed in defendants who had appeared in traffic or misdemeanor court in Illinois (Tyler, 1984). Furthermore, interviews with litigants in civil cases in the USA revealed that litigants felt court processes were fair, even if they lost the case (Adler, Hensler, & Nelson, 1983). Outcome satisfaction was determined by perceptions of procedural justice by 628 male defendants charged with a variety of felonies in three US cities (Casper et al., 1988), regardless of the outcome of the case.

We identified only one published study in which sex offenders' perceptions of the courts were examined (Walker & Louw, 2006) and this was in relation to a specialist sex offenses court in Bloemfontein (South Africa). The 54 male respondents were generally positive about their interactions with the police service. Almost two-thirds (61%) felt that they had not been treated differently to those arrested for non-sex crimes. The most frequent reason given for this was that they had been treated fairly and respectfully. In relation to the trial, the majority (87%) were able to understand the questions asked, and a similar proportion (89%) felt they had been able to make themselves understood. Of those who had been represented by an attorney, there were mixed views

with the quality of service they had received. Half reported that they were less than satisfied (23%), or very unhappy (27%). Almost two-fifths (38%) felt that the court had failed totally to administer justice, with the same proportion (38%) stating that it has succeeded to some extent. Criticisms of the court related to the large number of female professionals of whom about a quarter (23%) of participants felt were biased towards the victims, as they themselves were potential victims of sexual assault. One-fifth (19%) felt that the courts had been selective in the facts presented as evidence and that more weight was given to the victims' testimonies than theirs; almost one-tenth (7%) felt their sentence was harsh for the type of crime. Overall, about three-quarters (74%) felt that an accused person would not be able to receive a fair trial at the court for sexual offenses. It is not possible to determine from this report patterns across individuals' responses (e.g., whether those who felt negatively about one aspect also felt negatively about other aspects).

Spill-Over Effects

Casper et al. (1988) found that the treatment a suspect received by the police was the most important determinant of perceived procedural justice throughout the CJS. "It appears that aspects of police treatment (e.g., politeness and respect) spill over onto defendant evaluations of their experience with courtroom personnel and their general sense of fair treatment" (Casper et al., 1988, p. 498). Baker et al. (2014) recently examined these effects in 525 female offenders incarcerated in the USA. Participants who believed the police were honest and who felt they had had an opportunity to voice their views were more likely to perceive the police as procedurally just. These perceptions of police honesty had a significant direct effect on perceptions of judge honesty and indirect effects on perceptions of voice in the courts and perceptions of court procedural justice. Baker et al. (2014) concluded that, "[b]ecause police officers are almost exclusively the first encounter for offenders entering the criminal justice system, they may be setting the tone for how the entire process from arrest to adjudication is perceived." (p. 159).

Similar spill-over effects from the court to incarceration were highlighted by Tatar II, Kaasa, and Cauffman (2012) in their examination of the court experiences, attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral outcomes for 94 female adolescents and young adults incarcerated in the USA. Those who perceived injustices during the legal process also had negative attitudes toward staff at the juvenile facility in which they were incarcerated, even though these staff did not influence court proceedings. Perceived injustice was related to individuals' characteristics (e.g., race), as well as having an impact at both an emotional, internalizing level (depressive symptoms) and behavioral, externalizing level (institutional offending and substance use). These effects were most apparent in participants who had been incarcerated for longer periods of time. In contrast, McGrath (2009) found that 206 young people's perceptions of procedural fairness of the processing in children's courts were not related to later recidivism. However, those who rated the court appearance as more stigmatizing were more likely to reoffend than those who rated it as less stigmatizing.

The Current Study

To our knowledge, no published study has examined sex offenders' perceptions of the police in respect of their police interviews as suspects and of the ensuing court cases, nor the link between these. The purpose of the current study, therefore, was to examine the impact of feelings of guilt on sex offenders' perceptions of the police and the outcome of the police interview and the spill-over effects of these perceptions of the police to perceptions of the courts, as per the hypothesized model shown in Figure 1. We hypothesized, firstly, that the feelings of guilt of participants at the time of police interview would affect their perceptions of the police officers conducting the interview and, therefore, also the interview outcome. Secondly, we predicted that perceptions of the police officers conducting the interviews would affect perceptions of the court and, in particular, that the more positively participants evaluated the police, the more positively they would evaluate the courts.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Method

Participants

Participants were 116 adult males serving sentences for committing sexual offenses against children under 16 years of age in Queensland, Australia. Participants were on average 42 years old ($SD = 12.4$; range = 18-65) at the time of data collection. Most (84%; $n = 97$) identified as White Australian; one-tenth (10%; $n = 12$) identified as Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples; two (2%) as Asian; and one (1%) as Maori. The remainder (3%; $n = 4$) did not provide ethnicity data. Almost one-fifth (16%) had no schooling or had attended primary school only. Almost a half (45%) had completed schooling up to year 10 (at age 15/16) and 14% had attended years 11 and 12 of high school (16-18 years). A quarter (25%) had enrolled in tertiary or university level education.

Most commonly, offenders were serving sentences for indecent treatment of a child under 16 years (73%) and/or maintaining an unlawful sexual relationship with a child (46%). Convictions were also for rape (27%), sodomy (15%), carnal knowledge (11%), incest (9%), indecent assault (3%), sexual assault (3%), and sexual homicide (2%)¹. Just over one-quarter (27%) had previous sexual offense convictions. About a quarter (24%) was serving concurrent sentences for nonsexual offenses and half (50%) had previous nonsexual offense convictions.

Measures

Participants were invited to complete a confidential survey about their sexual offending histories including their experiences with the police and courts. All participants were asked to provide specific details on their developmental histories, their first and subsequent sexual contacts with children (whether or not these incidents had been the subject of criminal charges), and their experiences with the police and courts, with the latter experiences being the focus of this paper².

Official demographic and offense history data were collated directly from participants' correctional files, with their permission.

Perceptions of the police and feelings at time of interview. Participants were asked 19 questions (see Table 1) about their perceptions of the police officers who interviewed them and their feelings at the time of the police interview. Participants were required to rate their response on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much so). The factorial structure of the items was assessed and the findings on the psychometric properties of the resulting factors are presented in the results section.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Outcome of the police interview. This was assessed by a single item specifically developed for the survey. Participants were required to indicate what happened at the end of the police interview and to report their response on a 6-category ordinal scale including the following options: "I declined to be interviewed" (8.6%); "I was interviewed but made no comment" (7.8%); "I denied the offence(s)" (12.9%); "I admitted some of the offence(s)" (8.6%); "I admitted most of the offence(s)" (18.1%); and, "I admitted all of the offences" (40.5%).

Perceptions of the court. This was assessed by four dichotomous items (see Table 2) referring to participants' experiences of the court (e.g., "Do you think the court understood your case?"). Participants were required to reply yes or no to each item. The factorial structure of the items was assessed, and the psychometric properties are presented in the results section.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Procedure

Appropriate university ethics and corrections research approvals were obtained prior to conducting the study. Participants were initially recruited by staff from Queensland Corrective Services, and consenting participants were referred to the research team to complete the survey. The

survey took approximately 1.5 hours to complete. Researchers were available to participants to answer questions or assist where problems with literacy were identified. Participation was confidential and voluntary. As participants were asked to provide information on offenses they may not have been convicted for, they were assured complete anonymity.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Perceptions of the police and feelings at time of interview. Descriptive statistics for the questions are shown in Table 1. Some of the items have skewness and kurtosis indices greater than 1 or lower than -1, indicating non-normal distributions. Consequently, the factorial structure was explored in Mplus7 using the MLR (Robust Maximum Likelihood) estimator, as recommended for the analysis of non-normal data (e.g., Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012; Yuan, Bentler, & Zhang, 2005). The original set of items included statements that have similar wording and, hence, it was anticipated that at least some items (more precisely their corresponding error terms) may share some variance above and beyond what they have in common with the factors. In order to address this potential issue, the Exploratory Structural Equation Modeling (ESEM; Asparouhov & Muthén, 2009) was implemented rather than an Exploratory Factor Analysis. Indeed, the ESEM approach has the advantage of providing access to all the parameters available within a Structural Equation Modelling approach (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2009), including the covariance between error terms.

The best solution was determined using the following criteria:

- 1) a set of fit indices: Chi-square (χ^2 , with non-significant values indicating a good fit), Comparative Fit Index (CFI; values greater than .90 indicate an adequate fit and values greater than .95 indicate a good fit), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA; values lower than .08 indicate an adequate fit and values lower than .06 indicate a good fit) and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR; values lower than .08

indicate a good fit);

- 2) simple structure (Thurstone, 1947), namely a solution in which each item shows a high factor loading on its corresponding factor (i.e., primary factor loading) and trivial factor loadings (i.e., secondary factor loadings) on any other factor. Generally, it is expected that the value of the secondary factor loadings will be lower than half of the value of the primary factor loading; and,
- 3) the theoretical meaning of the factors.

After dropping items loading on more than one factor, a 2-factor solution (see Table 1) resulted in a satisfactory set of fit indices: $\chi^2 = 78.26$, $df = 50$, $p = .0065$; RMSEA = .07, CI [.039 - .102], $p = .123$; CFI = .95; SRMR = .046. We labelled the two factors 'perceptions of the police' (PP) and 'feelings of guilt' (FG). A prototypical item for the first is "Was the police interviewer friendly?", while for the second is, "Did you feel guilty about the offence?". The two factors positively correlated ($r = .29$, $p = .038$) and showed adequate reliability, as attested by Factor Determinacies and Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients of .92 and .92 for PP and .97 and .78, respectively, for FG. In this solution, the error terms of the three pairs of items were allowed to correlate: in particular, items 1 ('Did you feel guilty about the offence') and 4 ('Were you ashamed about having committed the offence') of the FG factor; items 1 ('Was the police interviewer patient') and 2 ('Was the police interviewer friendly'), 6 ('Did the police interviewer show sympathy towards you'), and 7 ('Did the police interviewer take a supportive approach towards you') of the PP factor. The correlations were .63, .39, and .29 respectively.

Perceptions of the court. Descriptive statistics for the four items are presented in Table 2. The factorial structure was explored implementing an Exploratory Factor Analysis for categorical data in Mplus7, with the WLSMV (Robust weighted least squares) estimator (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012). This method is recommended for use in applied research for analyzing ordinal or

dichotomous variables (Flora & Curran, 2004). The fit for the one-factor solution was: $\chi^2 = 1.38$, $df = 2$, $p = .50$; RMSEA = .00, CI [.000 - .173], $p = .585$; CFI = 1.00; SRMR = .058. As suggested by some authors (e.g., Kenney, Kanishan & McCoach, 2015), indices such as the RMSEA may be less reliable when there are low degrees of freedom as in this case; however, given the non-significant χ^2 , we still considered the fit as adequate. Reliability was assessed by the composite reliability (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2011) that was .77. Furthermore, the single indicator reliability was investigated, providing an evaluation of the reliability of each item, and a critical value for item 4 (.10) was highlighted. Consequently, this item was then not included in further analysis.

Test of the Hypothesized Model

The hypothesized relationships were tested through structural equation modelling (SEM), a technique that allows us to examine simultaneously all the paths among the variables. Prior to this, correlations between the variables were explored (presented in Table 3), showing that: FG significantly correlated with both PP and interview outcome (IO), but not with PC; PP significantly correlated with IO and PC; and finally, IO and PC did not correlate.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

In line with the results of the factor analyses discussed above, FG, PP, and PC were defined as latent variables, identified by their corresponding indicators (i.e., FG by its five items, PP by its eight items, and PC by its three items) (see Figure 2). IO was included as an observed variable assessed by a single item. As per the hypothesized model (Figure 1), FG was defined as a predictor of both relationships with PP and IO. In turn, PP was defined as a predictor of IO and PC.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

As PC is a latent variable defined by categorical indicators, the WLS-MV method for parameter estimation was used (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012). To evaluate the goodness of fit of the posited model, we considered a set of indices, in line with Hoyle's (1995) and Tanaka's (1993):

the Chi-square (χ^2); the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and the Weighted Root Mean Square Residual (WRMR; values lower than 1 indicate a good fit).

The tested model (see Figure 2) had an excellent fit ($\chi^2 = 111.45$, $df = 113$, $p = .52$; CFI = 1.00; RMSEA = .000, [CI = .000 - .046], $p = .97$; WRMR = .553) and supported our hypotheses. FG significantly positively affects both PP ($\beta = .22$) and IO ($\beta = .36$). Furthermore, PP significantly affects positively both IO ($\beta = .21$) and PC ($\beta = .35$). All these are multiple β coefficients, meaning that they express the unique contribution of the specific independent variable on the dependent variable, after controlling for any further independent variable included in the model. The proportion of explained variance is .21 for IO and .12 for PC. Note, in line with results of the factorial analysis, the correlations between items 1 and 4 ($r = .62$) of FG, items 1 and 2 ($r = .45$) and items 6 and 7 ($r = .32$) of the relationship with the police scale were also estimated in the model.

Discussion

In a sample of men incarcerated for sexual offenses in Australia, we examined the links between feelings of guilt, perceptions of the police, police interview outcome, and spill-over onto perceptions of the court. We found that the more individuals felt guilty at the time of interview, the more positive perceptions of the police they had. Furthermore, both these factors were linked to an increased likelihood of admitting the crime during the interview. In addition, perceptions of the police were directly related to perceptions of the courts, showing spill-over effects from the police to the courts (i.e., individuals who had more positive perceptions of the police, had more positive perceptions of the courts).

To our knowledge, only two previous studies have examined the spill-over effects from the police to the courts. One employed a sample of male felony offenders (Casper et al., 1988) and the other a sample of incarcerated female offenders (Baker et al., 2014) in the USA. In the present study,

we demonstrated these effects in incarcerated sex offenders in Australia, suggesting that these effects can be found in many offender groups and across jurisdictions. These findings highlight the important role that police officers play in society as gatekeepers to the criminal justice system (CJS).

Interactions with suspects seem to have both immediate effects, in terms of impact on interview outcomes, and long-term influences, in relation to perceptions of other institutions and professionals within justice systems. Treatment by police officers may indicate to individuals how they will be treated by others and acts as an indicator as to whether the CJS is fair or unfair. These perceptions and expectations may then influence the rest of their encounters with criminal justice staff/organizations (Baker et al., 2014). These perceptions may be reinforced or exacerbated as individuals move through the system. Tatar II et al. (2012), for example, demonstrated similar spill-over effects from the court to incarceration. Alternatively, these perceptions may influence how individuals behave towards others (e.g., negative perceptions of the police might lead to psychological reactance), as suggested by Gudjonsson (1994), which changes the way offenders behave and is then likely to influence interactions with, and behavior towards, them. Or the perceptions could influence offenders' expectations, which then influence their perceptions. This study is not able to provide support for any of these or other potential explanations, which require further investigation. As far as we know, no one to date has empirically studied the spill-over effects throughout the CJS nor the factors that underpin these effects, which warrants examination.

The results of these studies have important implications for police officers, who should be mindful of the important role they play, not just in relation to the current encounter with an individual and the investigation of the incident/case, but as an influential 'markers' of future encounters. Officers who do not give individuals a 'voice', or do not treat individuals with respect and neutrality and engender feelings of trustworthiness, may influence an individual's perception of, and extent of cooperation with, the courts and other organizations and institutions. Given that clients'

perceptions of therapists (Horvath, 2000) and their engagement in the treatment process have been related to positive treatment outcomes (for reviews, see Holdsworth, Bowen, Brown, & Howat, 2014a, b), these early encounters could even play a role in rehabilitation.

In the present study, participants' feelings of guilt at the time of the police interview were related to the police interview outcome, a finding that supports those of Beauregard and Mieczkowski (2012) and Deslauriers-Varin, Lussier, and St-Yves (2011). Beauregard and Mieczkowski examined sex offenders' feelings at the time of the offence, while we examined feelings at the time of the police interview. Combined, this might suggest that feelings of guilt are relatively stable over time and impact on the admission to crimes. However, more research is needed on this issue, particularly since Beauregard and Mieczkowski (2012) did not establish a link between guilt and admission in rapists. Gudjonsson and Sigurdsson (2000) argued that sexual abusers of children had a higher need to confess than abusers of adults (rapists), which might account for differences between the rapists and other sex offenders investigated by Beauregard and Mieczkoski.

While police officers may not be able to influence levels of guilt felt following the commission of a crime or at the start of a police interview, they can influence the way in which they behave towards suspects during interviews. Our findings show that perceptions of the police during interviews had a direct and independent link to the police interview outcome. This supports the principles of procedural justice in that perceptions of supportiveness, neutrality, fairness, patience, and a lack of aggression are, in combination, associated with admission during interviews. Our results are supportive of the literature on this issue (e.g., Holmberg & Christianson, 2002; Kebbell et al., 2010) and to wider research extolling the benefits of a fair and neutral approach in interviewing individuals to elicit the truth (e.g., Milne & Bull, 1999). Despite this, research has demonstrated that officers do not always do this in practice (Oxburgh et al., 2006), with sex offenders potentially being more likely to receive negative experiences. Holmberg and Christianson (2002), for example, found

that sex offenders' ratings of police officers' respect and kindness were lower compared to those of murderers. This has implications for police officers and their training where it should be stressed that they should approach suspects in a fair, neutral, respectful, and supportive manner, avoiding aggression.

This study is the first, to our knowledge, in which the spill-over effects from the police to the courts have been examined in a sample of males incarcerated for sexual offenses. However, the findings should be examined within the context of the limitations of the study. Our sample size was modest and, as with most other studies in this field, we were reliant on retrospective self-report recorded during incarceration. It is possible that later experiences influenced memories of earlier experiences and respondents were asked to remember their perceptions of temporally distant events. As Baker et al. (2014) noted, misremembering is always a potential problem in retrospective analyses, but the distinct temporal markers of arrest and the court experiences that led to imprisonment may be robust enough to counter the effects of memory loss or distortion. Moreover, there are potentially many reasons why perceptions of the police and police interview outcomes might be associated with perceptions of the courts. The evidence might be stronger in some cases and perceptions/experiences of the police might influence how offenders react/behave, which might in turn influence how others react and behave towards them. Offender characteristics (e.g., hostility, suspiciousness) might also influence their perceptions and the way in which they respond. From our data, it is not possible to determine the reasons for these associations and more research is required that employs a prospective design and/or is able to control and study these effects to provide a clearer understanding of the impact of early criminal justice interactions on later perceptions.

Although our results are similar to the other two studies examining spill-over effects, the findings from the incarcerated males in one state in Australia may not be generalizable to other offending populations. The participants agreed to take part in a study that involved the completion of

a lengthy questionnaire and it has not been possible to establish the representativeness of this sample to the wider population of incarcerated sexual offenders in Queensland or Australia. Finally, in this study we did not specifically ask participants about, or directly measure perceptions of, procedural justice, which warrant investigation in future studies with this population.

Nevertheless, the findings of the study highlight the importance of canvassing offenders' views of their interactions with professionals within the CJS in order to improve practice. Investigations of offenders' views are still rare in relation to procedural justice practices and in the evaluation of criminal justice processes more generally. It seems that police officers' behaviors are particularly important as they are gatekeepers to the CJS and individuals' perceptions of them have both short-and long-term impacts. More research is required to examine the extent of the pervasiveness of early encounters with the police and the factors that exacerbate or moderate these over time. Since early experiences cannot be changed, it is important to establish strategies that can be employed to reduce these effects throughout the criminal justice process.

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Endnotes

¹As many offenders were serving sentences for more than one offence, these percentages do not total 100%.

²The questions were originally developed by Kebbell for the Australian Research Council Linkage Project, LP0668287, led by Smallbone, Wortley, Kebbell, & Rallings.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and Exploratory Structural Equation Modeling (ESEM) results for police interview questions

Items	Descriptive statistics					ESEM	
	Valid N	Mean	s.d.	Skewness	Kurtosis	Relationship with the police	Feelings of guilt
Was the police interviewer patient (PP1)	106	4.74	2.07	-0.5	-0.92	0.77	0.02
Was the police interviewer friendly (PP2)	108	4.41	2.25	-0.22	-1.39	0.85	0.05
Was the police interviewer aggressive towards you (PP3)	108	2.73	2.04	0.82	-0.72	-0.72	0.01
Did the police interviewer appear to be neutral (PP4)	107	3.42	2.18	0.37	-1.19	0.70	0.01
Did the police interviewer show a positive attitude towards you (PP5)	108	3.69	2.17	0.21	-1.27	0.96	-0.04
Did the police interviewer show sympathy towards you (PP6)	108	2.41	1.83	1.17	0.48	0.66	-0.05
Did the police interviewer take a supportive approach towards you (PP7)	107	3.14	1.98	0.51	-0.85	0.78	0.00
Did the police attempt to pressure you into confessing (PP8)	108	3.62	2.35	0.24	-1.48	-0.59	-0.01
Did you feel guilty about the offence (FG1)	107	6.27	1.71	-2.43	4.61	0.05	0.41
Did you think you would have a sense of relief if you told (FG2)	103	5.15	2.27	-0.87	-0.8	0.00	0.73
Did you feel you needed to talk to someone about what you had done (FG3)	107	5.47	2.05	-1.18	0.07	-0.08	0.69
Were you ashamed about having committed the offence (FG4)	106	6.58	1.34	-3.61	12.24	-0.02	0.42
Did you want to get it off your chest (FG5)	105	5.48	2.11	-1.12	-0.15	0.02	0.86
Did you not want other to know what you had done	105	5.81	1.93	-1.54	1.16	Dropped	
Did you not want to accept what you had done	104	3.29	2.45	0.48	-1.44	Dropped	
Did you believe the police would have enough evidence to prove your guilt	108	5.06	2.2	-0.74	-0.88	Dropped	
Did the police interviewer appear to be interested in seeking the truth	108	4.62	2.21	-0.45	-1.13	Dropped	
Did the police interviewer give you time to comment	108	4.76	1.88	-0.5	-0.59	Dropped	
Did the police interviewer cooperate with you during the interview	108	4.3	2.11	-0.25	-1.17	Dropped	

Note: a. Items were assessed on a on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much so). Higher score correspond to higher level of agreement.

Table 2*Descriptive statistics and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) results for court questions*

Items	Descriptive statistics		EFA
	Valid N	Yes proportion	Factor loadings
1: Do you think your lawyers did a good job of representing you?	106	25.5%	.77
2: Do you think the court understood your case?	106	20.8%	.82
3: Do you think the court outcome was fair?	106	38.7%	.73
4: Do you think the court made you realise how serious your offences were?	105	75.2%	.32

Table 3*Correlation matrix between the variables under study*

	1	2	3
1. FG: Feelings of guilt			
2. PP: Perceptions of the police	.263**		
3. IO: Interview outcome	.358**	.289**	
4. PC: Perceptions of the court	.069	.308**	.088

Note: ** $p < .01$

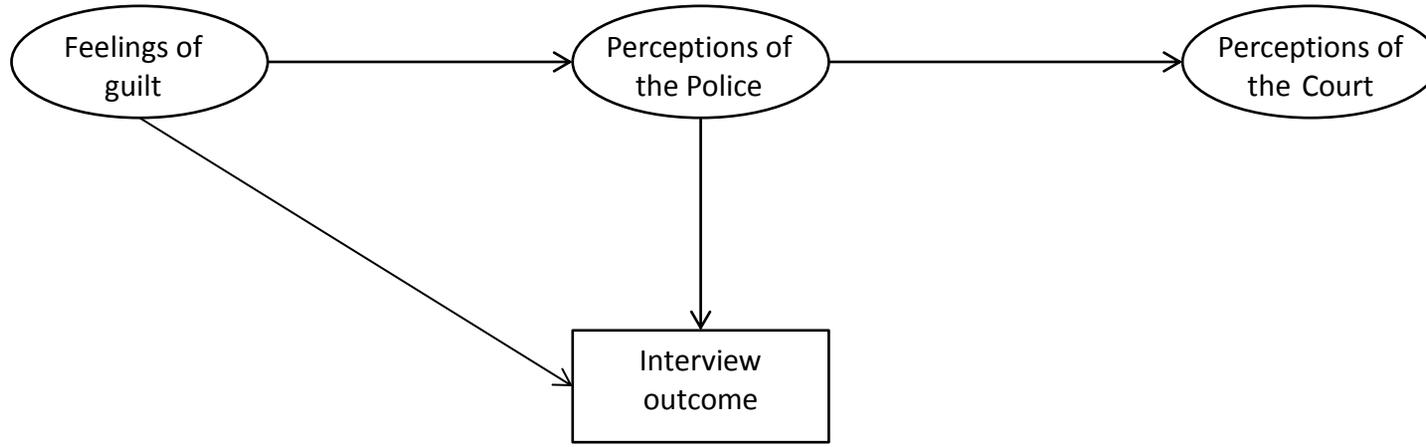
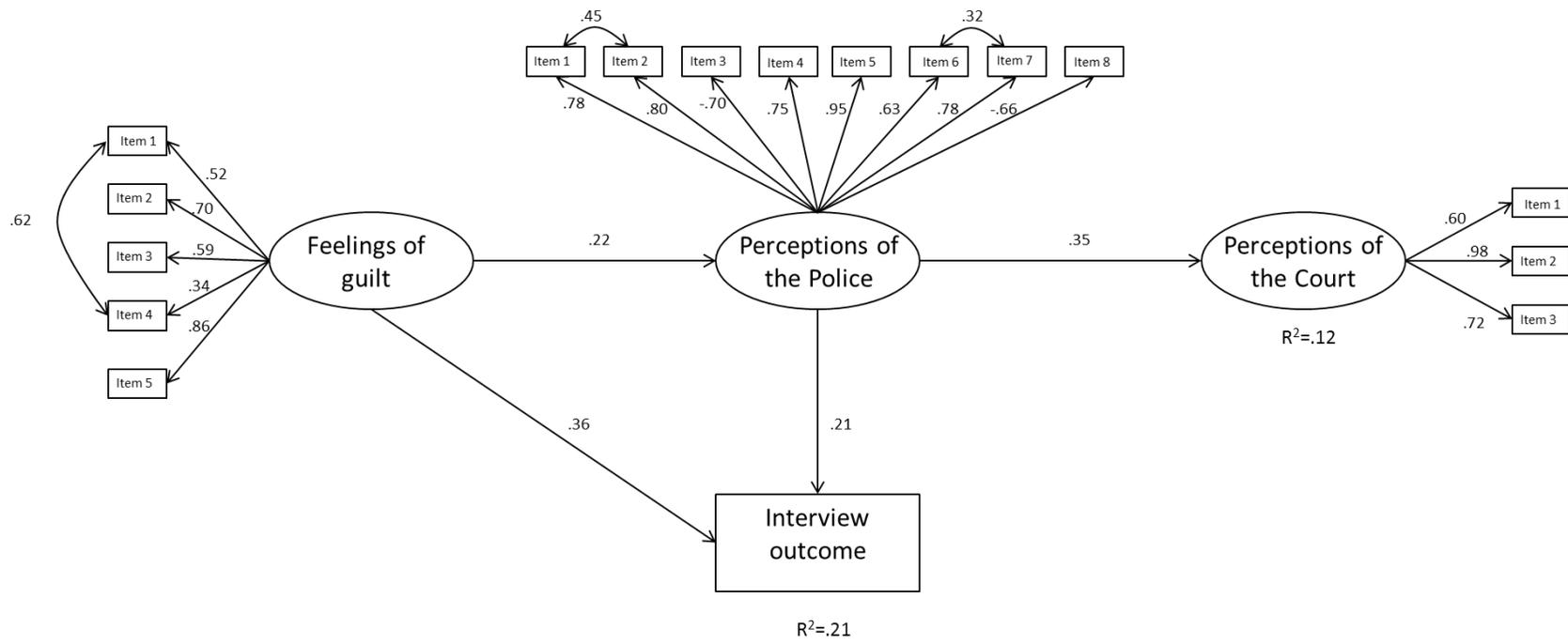


Figure 1. The hypothesized model.



Note. All coefficients are significant at $p < .05$

Figure 2. The results of the structural equation model.