Volume 1

Causal and Contributing Factors to Firesetting

Amongst Individuals with Learning Disabilities

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D. Clin. Psych. 2001
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ProQuest Number: 10010084

ProQuest 10010084

CONTENTS: VOL. 1

ABSTRACT

Fires that are set deliberately are at great cost to the United Kingdom. Research suggests that, within the general population, individuals who commit arson tend to have histories of psychosocial disadvantage, poor social skills, low assertiveness, external loci of control, increased interest in fire. Feelings of anger, abuse, a wish for revenge or change in life circumstances appear to precede the actual fire setting. It has been suggested that people with learning disabilities may be over-represented amongst arsonists. However, few studies have focused on arsonists with learning disabilities and we know very little about this group. In order to address this shortcoming, the present study set out to investigate causal and contributing factors to fire setting among the learning disability population.

In the first part of the study, fire setters are compared to other offenders and non-offenders, matched for ability, on five factors: assertiveness, locus of control, self-esteem, anger and fire interest. In addition, key demographic and historical data was collected on each participant and compared across groups. Arson offenders were more likely to have an external locus of control and showed a greater interest in fire than the other two groups. In addition, both offender groups had experienced more psychosocial disadvantage, including abuse, early losses, and disruption of schooling.

In the second part of the study, fire setting and the broader context in which it occurred was explored in depth in interviews with ten of the arson offenders. These interviews were analysed using qualitative methodology and several themes seemed to emerge. Participants described negative childhood experiences including having experienced physical and sexual abuse, neglect, and rejection. Participants also described having early behaviour problems and of feeling excluded and different to other children. Fire setting itself was often immediately preceded by negative events and experiences which were frequently interpersonal in nature and seemed to 'mirror' experiences in childhood, e.g. feeling rejected. These experiences were often associated with a

sense of injustice and angry feelings. At the time of setting fires participants described negative personal circumstances e.g. substance misuse and few, if any, supportive relationships. Participants described planning fire setting, often in some detail, however they showed naivety in their awareness of the dangers of fire and in their beliefs about being able to escape punishment. As a result of setting fires individuals described positive outcomes which motivated and maintained their firesetting including, feelings of excitement and pleasure, a release of tension, a sense of power, a sense of belonging and importance and obtaining help with difficulties. Clinical and research implications of these findings are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Fires that are set deliberately are at great cost to the United Kingdom. Approximately 3,200 arson fires are estimated to be set each week (Arson Prevention Bureau, 1998). The physical cost of this is thought to be 2 deaths and 50 injuries per week. The financial cost is approximately 25 million pounds per week. In view of this high human and financial cost, understanding fire setting and finding appropriate interventions which will reduce the risk of re-offending is of great importance. While the limited data available indicates that individuals with learning disabilities are responsible for a significant proportion of arson offences committed, very little empirical research has focused on this group. The current study aims to further our understanding of arson by people with learning disabilities.

Throughout the study the term 'fire setting' is used to describe a pathological behavioural pattern of setting fires repetitively. 'Arson' is used to describe the crime of setting a fire for any reason. 'Pyromania' is a condition defined in The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) which represents a compulsion to set fires.

In this introduction I have considered the historical status and influential theories of fire setting. I have then examined the psychiatric classification of 'pyromania' and suggest that it is problematic when applied to individuals with learning disabilities. The main part of my introduction is devoted to a review of the current research on firesetting within the general forensic population. Such research examines characteristics of arson offenders, motivations for arson and possible functions of firesetting. The sparse literature on fire setting by individuals with learning disabilities is reviewed and the nature of learning disabilities and its relevance to fire setting behaviour is considered.

Firesetting in History

Since Ancient Roman times arson and firesetting offences have been recognised and the perpetrators deemed punishable e.g. by death, injury or banishment. However, from the early

nineteenth century arson offenders began to be described in hospital records and medical texts since this time there has been an attempt to understand motiveless arson or 'pathological arson' (Geller, 1992). A disorder called 'incendiary monomania' or 'pyromania' was first described by Marc (1833). It was described as being characterised by impulses to set fires and as especially common in pubescent girls. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there has been some debate as to whether pyromania actually exists as a singular psychiatric disorder. Some researchers argue that individuals who set fires have multiple and varied psychiatric pathologies and therefore suggest that individuals who set fires cannot all be considered by one psychiatric diagnosis of pyromania (Geller, 1992). Historically, psychodynamic theories have been most influential in attempts to explain firesetting.

Psychodynamic theories (and their influence)

Until the 1980s the psychodynamic literature dominated attempts to explain pathological firesetting. Stekel (1924) viewed pyromania as a specific disorder and claimed that sexual impulses contributed or led to arson. Freud (1932) cited the myth of Prometheus who stole the fire from the Gods and brought it to man hidden in a hollow stick which Freud claimed was a phallic symbol. He proposed that in order to acquire fire it was necessary for man to deny his instinctual 'homosexually tinged desire' to put the fire out with his urine, as urinating is one of the functions of the penis. He viewed the other function of the penis as the 'act of love'. Thus, Freud (1932) argued that fire could be considered as analogous to the 'passion of love' or libido. He noted the warmth of fire elicits the same 'glow' as is experienced through sexual excitement and claimed that the physical representation of flames is suggestive of a phallus in action. The link between sexual excitement and arson is supported by later therapists. For example, Scott (1978) describes 'firebugs' who are not able to satisfy themselves sexually in the usual way and gain sexual satisfaction through masturbating while viewing fire and flames. Later, Zachary (1994) described how the image of a fire in the lift-shaft again represents the phallic-shaped flame which originated with Prometheus. For psychodynamic theorists then, fire is a sexual symbol and 'pyromania' is related to masturbation, sexual dysfunction and urinary dysfunction and is thought to represent a deeply rooted intrapsychic dysfunction. Further, some psychodynamic theorists believe that

individuals who set fires display sadism and gain sexual pleasure though watching cruelty. As evidence for this they cite examples of a 'clinical triad' of behaviours consisting of enuresis, cruelty to animals and firesetting (Rice and Harris, 1995). Individuals who set fires are therefore deemed to be very difficult to treat and to have poor prognosis (Gold, 1962; Zachary, 1994). However, psychodynamic theories of firesetting have been criticised for being based on a small number of individual case studies reported only when they are consistent with those already in the literature. Whilst these case studies may be of interest, reliability and validity are often compromised (Harris and Rice, 1984; Rice and Harris, 1995). Importantly, empirical studies comparing arson offenders with non-arson offenders have found little evidence for the 'clinical triad' or sexual deviation amongst arson offenders (Bradford, 1982; Koson and Dvoskin, 1982; Rice and Harris, 1995).

Despite this lack of empirical evidence, until recently psychodynamic theories have influenced how fire setters were apprehended and detained, with investigators looking for childhood cruelty to animals, sexual gratification resulting from firesetting, and enuresis in those suspected of setting fires. In addition, it has been recommended by some investigators that fire setters be incarcerated with little anticipated reformation (Harris and Rice, 1984). Even now fire setters spend what might seem a disproportionate amount of time imprisoned compared to other offenders (Jackson, 1994).

The Psychiatric Classification of Fire Setting

In DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) pathological fire setting is classified under the term pyromania which promotes the idea of pathological fire setting as a distinct disorder. The notion of 'pyromania' or firesetting as a specific disorder is supported by those who view it as an impulse disorder (Mavromatis and Lion, 1977) and 'pyromania' is cited in DSM-IV under 'Impulse-Control Disorders Not Elsewhere Classified'. The essential feature of impulse disorders listed in DSM-IV is a "failure to resist impulses, drives or temptations to perform acts harmful to the person themselves or to others"(p. 609). 'Pyromania' is said to occur with greater frequency in men, "especially those with poorer social skills and learning difficulties" (p. 614). There is no mention in DSM-IV of predisposing factors, prevalence or familial patterns associated with the disorder. Similarly, the longitudinal course of the disorder is said to be unknown.

For a diagnosis of 'pyromania' to be made, all of the following criteria must be satisfied under DSM-IV:

a). Deliberate and purposeful fire setting on more than one occasion;

b) Tension or affective arousal before the act;

c) Fascination with, interest in, curiosity about, or attraction to fire and its situational contexts (e.g. paraphernalia, uses, consequences);

d) Pleasure, gratification, or relief when setting fires, or when witnessing or participating in the aftermath;

e) The fire setting is not done for monetary gain, as an expression of socio-political ideology, to conceal criminal activity, to express anger or vengeance, to improve one's living circumstances, in response to a delusion or hallucination, or as a result of impaired judgement (e.g. in dementia, mental retardation, substance intoxication);

f) The fire setting is not better accounted for by conduct disorder, a manic episode, or antisocial personality disorder.

(American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

However, the DSM-IV diagnostic criteria seem rather confusing in relation to the different usage of the terms 'mental retardation', 'learning disability' and 'learning difficulty' in an American and British context. As noted, DSM-IV suggests that 'pyromania' may be more common amongst individuals with a learning difficulty and poor social skills. In America usage of the term 'learning difficulty' refers to 'Learning Disorders', including 'Reading Disorder', 'Mathematics Disorder', 'Disorder of Written Expression' or 'Learning Disorder Not Otherwise Specified' (APA, 1994). However, despite a thorough search of the literature, the current author was unable to find any research which suggests 'Learning Disorders' as defined by DSM-IV are more common amongst firesetters. In contrast, there is research evidence to suggest that 'Mental Retardation' is common amongst firesetters (Yesevage et al., 1983; Walker and McCabe, 1973). But by definition 'mental retardation' should preclude a diagnosis of 'pyromania' (see DSM-IV criteria above).

Other researchers also suggest the diagnostic category 'pyromania' in DSM-IV may be of limited use. Koson and Dvoskin (1992) were unable to find any arsonists who matched the criteria for pyromania in DSM-III (which were essentially the same as those for DSM- IV) even though 38% of their sample were repetitive arsonists. Similar findings have been reported by Bradford (1982) in a study of 32 arson offenders charged and sent for pre-trial assessments, and Yesavage et al (1983).

In one of the largest studies of its kind Lewis and Yarnell (1951) studied the characteristics of over 1,500 arson offenders. Their data did not support many of the psychodynamic theories about fire setting. Only 3.5% of their subjects claimed to be sexually motivated to set fires and apparently none had urinary problems. They found that pathological fire setting is more highly complex than the concept of pyromania would suggest and the fire setters in their sample fell into many diagnostic categories which would be excluded from a diagnosis of pyromania under DSM-IV, including psychopathic disorder, schizophrenia, mental handicap and conduct disorder (Lewis and Yarnell, 1951). Other researchers have also found pathological fire setting to be highly complex, with regard to the offenders themselves and their motivations, and have suggested that the pyromania diagnosis is inadequate to describe the majority of firesetters (Rice and Harris, 1995; Jackson et al., 1987a; Jackson, 1994).

Fires are set for many reasons, including insurance fraud and covering up a crime. It therefore seems important to distinguish between pathological and non-pathological firesetting. Most researchers have suggested that pathological fire setting can be diagnosed when the arson appears to be motiveless or is not understandable. However, Jackson (1994) stresses the need for caution, noting that even where an individual sets a fire to cover up a crime or for insurance purposes, they may have significant pathology which leads them to do so. In addition, Jackson (1994) argues that true 'motiveless arson' does not exist and that acts of pathological arson may have some element of planning or motive even if they cannot be considered rational or controlled.

Current Studies of Arson

Current studies of arson could be considered to fall into three broad areas:-

1.   those which examine characteristics of arson offenders;

2.   those which try to classify arsonists with regard to motivations for arson; and

3.   those which look at the function of the continuing firesetting for the individual (functional analysis).

Below I review some of the key research in each of these areas.

1. Studies of the Characteristics of arsonists

1a. Psychiatric Diagnoses

Some researchers have focused on psychiatric diagnoses as a possible way to explain arson or classify arson offenders:-

Depression: Canter and Fritzon (1999) found that of those in their sample of arson offenders who had received a psychiatric diagnosis, most received a diagnosis of a depressive disorder (84%) or psychosis (33%). They also found that 57% of those with a psychiatric diagnosis had made suicide threats and that 43% had attempted suicide (Canter and Fritzon, 1999). However, Jackson et al (1987b) found no difference on the Zung Depression Scale, a 20 item self report scale, between arson offenders and violent offenders, although both rated themselves as more depressed than controls. This suggests that depression may be an issue for offenders in general, not just arson offenders, possibly due to the isolation and lack of social support experienced by those incarcerated in prisons (Biggam and Power, 1997; Cooper and Livingstone, 1992) or the high rate of psychosocial disadvantage found amongst prisoners in general (Towl and Crighton, 1996).

Psychosis: Most studies have found a percentage of their sample experience psychosis. Lewis and Yarnell (1951) suggested up to 30% of all arson cases could be explained by schizophrenia. Although other researchers have found as little as 9% of firesetting may be explained by schizophrenia (Bradford, 1982). Jackson (1994) warns that to assume schizophrenia can *explain* fire setting behaviour is too simplistic as the two can co-occur. Even if an individual has psychosis, it does not necessarily follow that their symptoms are specifically fire related and promote fire-setting behaviour. An individual who experiences psychosis may also experience other disadvantages which may be more or equally important when considering fire setting behaviour. Further, Jackson (1994) notes that even where a subject claims to have set fires in response to voices, there is a possibility that this may be a means to avoid taking personal responsibility or to avoid punishment.

Personality Disorders: Studies have found personality disorder diagnoses to be more prevalent among arson offenders than other offenders (Geller, 1992; Jackson, 1992; Puri et al., 1995). Bradford (1982) found 52.9% of the 34 arson offenders in his sample had personality disorder diagnoses, compared to 20% of his control group of 50 other offenders. However, other studies have found no such difference between arson offenders and other offenders on diagnosis (Rice and Harris, 1991; Rice and Harris, 1995). In addition, the possible presence of personality disorders among arson offenders offers little in the way of understanding *why* individuals carry out firesetting. Further, Bradford (1982) suggests that, perhaps due to the notoriety of the offence of arson due to the continuing legacy of psychodynamic formulations of fire setting (which view arson offenders as sexually deviant and untreatable), arson offenders may be more likely to be diagnosed as having antisocial personality disorder.

It seems then, that arson offenders appear to have a variety of diagnoses not uncommon in other offending groups. Although clearly psychiatric labels alone appear inadequate to explain arson, Canter and Fritzon (1998) suggest that at least some arson offences must partly emerge out of the person's self-destructive emotions, associated with psychiatric disorders.

1b. Personal History

The family history and social circumstances of arson offenders are often found to be particularly disadvantaged. For example, arsonists have been found to have been received into care at an earlier age than other offenders (Jackson et al., 1987b). However, the authors note that this could have been as a direct result of childhood firesetting which may be thought to be more dangerous in the community than, for example, aggression (Jackson et al., 1987b). Arson offenders have often had poor or 'inadequate' relationships with their parents (Jackson, 1994) and often the fathers may have been absent from the family home (Macht and Mack, 1968). Using file data, Stewart and Culver (1982) estimated that of young arson offenders in their sample, 70% had natural parents who were 'antisocial' (a history of crime or imprisonment), alcoholic, depressed or who had 'some undiagnosed disorder'. These findings would seem very important, given that psychiatric disorders in parents are known to affect parenting and can be detrimental for children's mental health (Department of Health, 2000). In addition, Stewart and Culver (1982) found a high percentage of arson offenders in their sample (66%) had experienced chaotic families with high rates of parental separation, parental rejection or parental marital discord, a finding supported by other studies (Yesevage, 1983).

Studies have also found arson offenders experience a high percentage of abuse as children. Stewart and Culver (1982) found that in their sample many arson offenders had experienced physical or sexual abuse (24%). In addition, Puri et al. (1995) found that 18% of male and 44% of female arson offenders in their sample had experienced sexual abuse and 18% of male and 11% of female arson offenders had experienced physical abuse.

Other studies have suggested that a chaotic and abusive family background is common amongst all groups of 'antisocial' individuals (Rutter et al., 1998). Studies which have used control groups of non-arson offending subjects have found little difference between the groups in terms of family discord, abuse and separation (Hill et al., 1982). Indeed, Bradford (1982) found that a history of abuse was slightly higher in his control group compared to his arson offending group.

Poor familial history then is likely to be an important but insufficient factor in trying to explain why individuals set fires.

1c. Gender

Studies have found a high proportion of arson offenders to be male (around 77%) compared to female (around 23%) (Lewis and Yarnell, 1951; Bradford, 1982). However, Tennant et al. (1971) note a particularly low prosecution rate in their sample of females who had set fires. They suggest this may bias some studies which include subjects only after prosecution, although it is noteworthy that they did not compare prosecution rates of female arson offenders with male arson offenders.

Some have suggested that female fire setters may represent a distinct group tending to present with 'depressive neurosis' (Bradford, 1982). In Northern Ontario where there are high rates of female arson offending, there are also higher rates of depression amongst women, higher suicide rates and higher homicide rates amongst the native Indian population. Bradford concludes the relationships between depression, aggression, homicide, suicide and arson is far from clear and requires further detailed study (Bradford, 1982).

Other studies have found higher rates of disturbance in female fire setters, with women showing:

a. higher rates of psychosis (32% as opposed to 20% of male fire setters (Lewis and Yarnell, 1951);

b. higher rates of mental illness (64% of arson offenders who were classified mentally ill were found to be women by Jackson, 1994);

c. higher rates of learning disabilities (68% as opposed to 48% of male fire setters (Lewis and Yarnell, 1951) and;

d. more self destructive tendencies (Rider, 1980).

However, again, there are methodological problems with these studies in that they did not have comparison groups of non-arson offenders. This is important as research has found that male and female offenders are treated differently with regard to arrest, sentencing and disposal (Stephenson, 1992) and differences found may simply be a tendency for higher rates of psychiatric diagnoses amongst female offenders per se.

Coid et al. (1993) studied women diagnosed with borderline personality disorder in 3 secure hospitals. The women reported that symptoms associated with mood related disorders could be relieved by a series of interchangeable behaviours including self injury and arson. Coid et al. (1999) studied female remand prisoners who had self injured and those who set fires. They found a sub-group with severe personality disorder, early onset of behavioural disorders and extensive criminality. They noted that female fire setters differed from their male counterparts in that the females were much more likely to have committed violent or aggressive acts. They did not find evidence of fire setting as a distinct disorder in this group, but found that setting fires was one of a variety of symptoms of disturbance and concluded that antisocial personality disorder and underlying mood disorders mediated the relationship between firesetting and other behaviours such as self mutilation (Coid et al., 1999). However, it is noteworthy that this study did not have a male comparison group and conclusions were based on comparing current results with results taken from the literature.

1d. Personal and interpersonal skills and characteristics.

Self Esteem: A large percentage of arson offenders experience low self esteem (Day, 1993). Jackson et al. (1987a) note that arson offenders may often pretend to be someone else, reflecting a dissatisfaction with themselves. It has been hypothesised that low self esteem may result from a harsh parenting style and generally poor parenting experienced by arson offenders (Jackson et al., 1987b; Department of Health, 2000). However, low self esteem has also been found amongst other offender groups (Beckett, 1994; Towl and Crighton, 1996; Biggam and Power, 1997). Self esteem may then be an important factor to consider in formulating why individuals set fires but clearly is inadequate as an explanation alone.

Physical Appearance: The physical appearance of arson offenders has been subjectively noted by researchers as being less attractive (Rice and Harris, 1991) and researchers have also noted that arson offenders may have mild physical disfigurement (Lewis and Yarnell, 1951; Jackson et al., 1987a; Clare et al., 1992). Clare et al. (1992) note that facial disfigurements can lead to lowered self esteem and lowered social effectiveness through negative comparison with others and negative social feedback.

Social Skills: Several studies have noted that arson offenders appear to have underdeveloped social skills and rate themselves to be ineffective socially (Geller, 1992; Bradford, 1992; Hurley and Monahan, 1969; Harris and Rice, 1995; Koson and Dvoskin, 1982). In particular, they have been found to have difficulties in interpersonal relationships (Canter and Fritzon, 1998) and high levels of interpersonal anxiety (Hurley and Monahan, 1968). Arson offenders have also been found to be more socially isolated than other offenders and to pursue more solitary activities, rather than social hobbies and interests (Harris and Rice, 1995; Hurley and Monaghan, 1969). Jackson et al. (1987a) found most of the arson offenders in their study had a history of being teased by peers, perceived themselves as socially rejected and were socially isolated.

Assertion and Aggression: Studies have found that arson offenders differ from violent offenders. Hill et al. (1982) found 90% accuracy in discriminating between property (i.e. non-violent) and violent offenders on three factors, namely violence towards others, alcohol abuse and having a psychiatric diagnosis. They found that 60% of arson offenders fitted into the category of property offenders (with less aggression and substance misuse) rather than violent offenders and suggested that arson offenders should therefore be considered as different from interpersonally violent offenders.

In addition, studies have noted that arson offenders are less likely than other offenders to have exhibited face to face aggressive behaviour (McKerracher and Dacre, 1966; Hurley and Monahan, 1969; Rice and Harris; 1991). Hurley and Monahan (1969) noted that many of the arson offenders in their sample were 'model prisoners' who appeared superficially polite, co-operative and undemanding, in contrast to many other prisoners who are described as 'obtrusive'. Further support for this distinction comes from studies which have found that arson offenders typically rate themselves as significantly less assertive than violent offenders (Jackson et al., 1987b; Rice and Harris, 1991). Rice and Harris (1991) found that arson offenders described themselves as having less control over their own lives compared with controls. Further, Keval et al. (1989) examined personal conflict resolution using the Levenson Locus of Control Questionnaire. They found that both arsonists and violent offenders were more likely to consider their world to be controlled by powerful others compared to non offenders, but that arsonists perceived themselves to have much less personal control than violent offenders. In an unpublished study (reported in Jackson, 1994) Jackson et al. (1991) compared male violent offenders and arson offenders (matched for age and IQ). They found significant differences between the two groups using the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (Watson and Friend, 1969) and the Rathus Assertiveness Scale (Rathus, 1979), with the arson offenders showing greater fear of negative evaluation and rating themselves as less assertive. However, high levels of aggressiveness and hostility have been found in arson offenders using the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (Koson and Dvoskin, 1982). Arson offenders may therefore try to avoid confrontation because they have low confidence in being able to deal effectively with face to face confrontation and they may fear being evaluated negatively.

Other researchers have suggested that arson offenders avoid interpersonal conflict for other reasons. Pollack (1980) found that arsonists were more able to take the perspective of others than violent offenders. He suggested that arsonists are better able to empathise with victims compared to violent offenders and therefore do not commit face to face violent offences against people because they do not wish to hurt others. Further, Jackson (1994) notes that many of the arson offenders that he has assessed take great care to avoid the risk of hurting anyone through their offences and many report that they would find it difficult to carry on living if people were hurt in a fire that they had set. If this were the case, it suggests a certain naivety about the possible violent consequences of some arson offences. This might be particularly relevant in considering arson offenders with a learning disability [see section on learning disability and arson]. Jackson (1994) concludes that although arson may be motivated at least partly by anger, revenge or frustration, it cannot be considered as simply a violent act in the same way as interpersonal violence.

2. Studies of motivation for arson

Some researchers have attempted to categorise arsonists according to their motivation for setting fires. Those trying to find typologies of motives for arson have generated several classifications of motives.

In one of the earliest attempts to classify arson offenders in this way, Lewis and Yarnell (1951) created the following typology of arson offenders in terms of motivations:

I   Accidental (i.e. fires set by accident)

II   Psychotic (i.e. fires set because the individual was experiencing psychosis)

III   Revenge (i.e. fires that were set for revenge)

IV   Sexual Gratification (i.e. fires that were set to gain sexual satisfaction)

V   Children's (i.e. fires set by children).

Bradford (1982) developed this classification further, based on his sample of 34 arson offenders, and added a further 3 groups (number of subjects and percentages are listed below):

	proposed classification of motivation for arson	*number and percentages*
I	Accidental	2 (5.9%)
II	Psychotic	3 (8.8%)
III	Revenge	13 (38.2%)
IV	Sexual Gratification	0 (0.0%)
V	Attention Seeking/Cry for Help	10 (29.4%)
VI	Professional	1 (2.9%)
VII	Children's	0 (0.0%)
VIII	Mixed	5 (14.7%)

The greatest percentage of Bradford's sample appear to be seeking revenge,suggesting that firesetting is a method for dealing with conflict. A large percentage of his sample also appear to be asking for help or for people to notice their situation, suggesting for these individuals firesetting may be a means of communication. This is supported by Geller (1984) who found that, following moves from institutional care to community care, many people could not cope with the move to less restrictive environments. He concluded that many fires were set by users of public sector mental health services and were 'communicative' of a desire for a change in location of those services and a wish to return to a large psychiatric hospital.

Swaffer and Hollin (1995) studied self reported reasons given by a small sample of adolescents (N=17) for setting fires. They found the following self reported reasons:

Motivation for arson	*Percentage of Sample*
I revenge	29%
II crime concealment	17%
III self injury	17%
IV peer group pressure	17%
V fascination	5%

Only one subject cited two reasons for his firesetting. A further 17% of the sample denied their offending history or said that their fire setting was accidental. In line with Bradford (1982), the greatest percentage of individuals who set fires reported that they did so for revenge. However, Swaffer and Hollin (1995) found that about one sixth of their sample also set fires for reasons of peer pressure, self injury and crime concealment. These motivations were not found by Bradford (1982). In addition, 'attention seeking' motivations, found in approximately one third of Bradford's sample (1982), were not found by Swaffer and Hollin (1995). Although to some extent this may reflect the age group of the sample interviewed by Swaffer and Hollin (i.e. adolescents) who may be more greatly affected by peer pressure, there seems little agreement about categorisation of arson offenders according to their motivations.

Another categorisation of arson offenders was proposed by Swaffer (1990) who studied the characteristics and treatment needs of adolescents at a youth treatment centre. Three sub-groups were found to represent the arson offenders:

a. *Delinquent*: those who could be diagnosed with 'conduct disorder' and who show characteristics which would be seen in antisocial personality disorder in adults.

Typically, for this group firesetting is not their only problem and not the main focus of treatment.

b.   *Destructive*: these are youths with poor social skills, difficulty in assertion and expression of anger. For these individuals firesetting is a means of expressing anger, asserting themselves and of gaining revenge.

c.   *Pathological*: young people who have a 'fixation' with fire and the paraphernalia associated with it, such as fire engines and firemen.

Clustering individual 'types' of fire setters in this way offers little to further our understanding how fire setting behaviour develops and what might underlie aspects of these categories or what they actually *mean* e.g. 'fixation with fire'.

Rice and Harris (1995) used cluster analyses to distinguish four sub-types of arson offenders from a group of 243 Canadian subjects:-

a.   *Psychotics*:   these individuals have little criminal history and use alcohol rarely. Their motives for setting fires are primarily delusional;

b.   *Unassertives*: these individuals have little criminal history and rarely show aggression. Of all arson offenders they tend to have the most functional family environments, have the highest IQs and have the best employment record. However, this group are the least assertive and motives for setting fires are often related to anger or revenge.

c.   *Multifiresetters*: these individuals often come from unstable homes, have poor schooling and low IQs. They usually have little criminal history although they begin setting fires at a younger age. Motivations for this group are primarily anger, revenge, excitement and attention seeking.

d.   *Criminals*:   these individuals have an extensive criminal background and are most

likely to be diagnosed with a personality disorder. They are the most assertive group

and are likely to commit other violent offences. They are also least likely to have known

the victim.

We can see that there is considerable overlap between the sub-types b. and c. proposed by Rice and Harris (1995), e.g. the motivations of anger and revenge are common in both groups and both groups have little criminal history. The boundaries between sub-types are not clear and it is not clear what precise criteria define whether an individual would be considered an 'unassertive' or a 'multi-firesetter'. In addition, all of the attempts at classification offer little understanding about how fire setting behaviour develops and what might underlie this behaviour e.g. amongst 'criminals'. The classifications seem to be describing trends rather than distinct sub-types of firesetters. Further, the differing classifications of arson offenders presented by different researchers call into question the usefulness of this approach in describing why individuals set fires. Clare et al. (1992) and Jackson et al. (1987a) also note that the attempt to find single motives for fire setting and categorise individuals accordingly is rather simplistic and limited in its explanative value.

3.   Functional analysis of arson:

Rather than using a typological approach, Jackson et al.(1987a) suggest using a functional analysis model to consider arson offending. This approach assumes that a behaviour is an adaptive response to conditions which surround the individual, either in the past or present. It examines the developmental factors of a behaviour and also considers what factors might maintain a behaviour. The functional analysis framework therefore demands a specification of variables of surrounding the behaviour and also considers the nature of the relationship between the behaviour and the relevant variables (Jackson et al., 1987a). Typically this includes consideration of antecedents (setting conditions - both distal and current), the behaviour itself and consequences. This framework allows for the recognition that the same behaviour may have different functions and

antecedents over time. This approach may be particularly useful for individuals who have learning disabilities since it does not rely entirely upon self report of motivations for setting fires, as most research does, and of which firesetters with lower IQs may be unaware.

Jackson et al. (1987a) present a functional analysis model of arson to fit the evidence emerging from a large number of studies:-

Functional Analysis of Arson

Intensified interest
In fire (pyromania)

Increased perceived
self esteem

Change in environment
(praise, attention,)

Increased Arousal

Restricted access to fire,
social contact

FIRESETTING

Special school, hospital, prison

Experience of effects of
fire, personal or vicarious

Increase in interpersonal
problems

Anger/Frustration

Desire to change situation
or environment

Perceived inability to effect
social change

Triggering event

Psychosocial disadvantage

Dissatisfaction with life and self

History of social ineffectiveness

Jackson et al. (1987a)

In this model, experiences of psychosocial disadvantage and feelings of dissatisfaction with life and self, especially with the presence of a triggering event such as an argument, lead to a desire to change the situation. However, as a result of a history of social ineffectiveness and low self

esteem, the individual perceives themselves as unable to make changes to their situation. This in turn leaves them feeling angry or frustrated. These feelings in combination with previous fire related experiences may lead to the individual setting fires. As a consequence of setting the fire the individual may achieve changes in their environment, increased arousal, or perceive themselves as being more effective. These factors, as well as the frequent resulting restricted access to fire (e.g. through incarceration), may positively reinforce their interest in fire. Setting the fire may lead to imprisonment or hospitalisation and an increase in interpersonal difficulties such as abandonment by one's family, which in turn may lead to further psychosocial disadvantage, dissatisfaction with life and self etc.

Factors identified as potential contributors to the development of firesetting behaviour identified in Jackson et al's 'model' are considered below:

3a. Possible Antecedents of Arson:-

i. *A history of psychosocial disadvantage:* As noted earlier, arson offenders frequently present a history of adverse social conditions such as family dysfunction and also personal disadvantages, such as poor schooling and lower IQ, physical abnormality and mental health difficulties. These two factors may interact together to develop into further disadvantage.

ii. *Dissatisfaction with life and self:* Arson offenders may be thought to experience dissatisfaction with life as evidenced by the high rates of depression and low self esteem (noted above). Some researchers have also noted that arson offenders in their sample may 'pretend to be' or act out successful more powerful roles, for example acting out heroic roles or helping the fire brigade (Lewis and Yarnell, 1951; Jackson et al., 1987a).

iii. *Ineffective social interactions:* Firesetters often experience a history of failure, for a variety of reasons, in social interactions and therefore may develop an expectation of failure (Jackson et al., 1987b). Further, as noted above, arson offenders often experience social isolation (imposed by

self or others), teasing and genuine or perceived social rejection. In addition they may be unassertive and experience fear of negative evaluation in social settings. In the light of their histories of psychosocial disadvantage, they may experience high levels of anger or hostility but may avoid interpersonal conflict.

iv.   *Specific psychosocial stimuli of firesetting:*   Even given individuals' histories of psychosocial disadvantage, social inadequacies and dissatisfaction with life and self, the question remains as to what leads individuals to set fires, rather than engage in other destructive or dangerous behaviours. One possible explanation is that fire setters may experience a lack of availability of socially effective responses. These restrictions may be imposed from outside the individual, with other socially effective responses failing to have effect, or result from inadequacies in personal social skills, such as poor conflict management skills. Other researchers have suggested that fire setting is a very powerful action which holds appeal for those who experience powerless positions such as those who have physical, emotional or intellectual disabilities (Macdonald, 1977). Fire can be considered an impressive, powerful, and destructive impetus (Stone, 1979). An individual who feels powerless is thus able to produce a grand destructive impetus with a small effort such as pouring petrol and striking a match.

On a different note, fire may have been a significant factor in arson offenders' earlier lives. Macht & Mack (1968) found that the fathers of all the arsonists in their sample had employment with fire services. Ritvo et al (1983) found a relatively high incidence of burns (often due to abuse) among their sample of arsonists and Wolford (1972) found many of the arsonists in his sample came from rural settings and had therefore witnessed field fires.

It has been suggested that arson offenders appear to have an abnormal fascination with fire and fire paraphernalia which is reported to stem from childhood (Lewis and Yarnell, 1951; Swaffer and Hollin, 1995; Rice and Harris, 1995). However, this proposition is not supported by all researchers (Jackson,1994). Although fire setters may express a strong interest in fire, so may

most of the population as fire is commonly considered a popular form of entertainment (e.g. bonfire night).

v.   *Triggering Stimuli*:   Even given psychosocial disadvantage, feelings of dissatisfaction with life and self, and limited interpersonal skills or opportunities for social effectiveness, it has been suggested that a 'trigger' is necessary for these setting conditions to lead to firesetting (Bumpass et al., 1983). Murphy and Clare (1996) carried out a functional analysis of cognitions and feelings related to firesetting with 10 individuals who had mild learning disabilities. They found the most common emotions experienced before setting fires were anger, followed by sadness, boredom and not feeling listened to. Other studies have reported similar findings and have also found feelings of powerlessness and anxiety precede fire setting (Bumpass et al., 1983; Clare et al.,1992).

3b.   Possible Consequences of Arson:

Setting a fire or helping the fire brigade may offer the powerless individual a sense of power, attention or an increase in self esteem, especially if they receive social recognition (Vreeland et al., 1980; Jackson et al., 1987a; Clare et al., 1992). The arson offender may also experience a release of tension or painful emotions, such as anger reduction (Hurley and Monahan, 1969; Clare et al., 1992; Murphy and Clare, 1996). The arson may draw attention to difficulties that the arson offender is having and may result in desired situational changes, e.g. move from less restrictive settings to increased restriction or increased attentiveness of carers (Bradford, 1982; Jackson et al., 1987a).

Consequences may also, however, serve to reinforce antecedent problems. Parents may adopt a punitive approach to their child's firesetting which in turn encourages secrecy. When the behaviour is secretive it is less likely to be punished, although secrecy may limit positive consequences and may result in the individual setting ever bigger fires to gain the same positive effect (Jackson et al., 1987a).

The arsonist may be locked away with little opportunities to develop an appropriate relationship with fire and appropriate alternative coping strategies in the presence of firesetting materials. In addition, the relationships in the family/care network of the arsonist may break down, leading to further social isolation.

Arson offenders with Learning Disabilities

Many of the studies mentioned thus far have found arsonists tend to have low average or borderline IQs and that the offence of arson may be particularly highly represented in the learning disability population. Nearly 50% of the 1300 arson offenders studied by Lewis and Yarnell (1951) were classified as 'mentally handicapped'. Other studies have found the proportion of arson offenders who have a learning disability to range from 20% (Yesevage et al., 1983) to 50% (Walker and McCabe, 1973). However, few studies have focused solely on individuals with a learning disability.

The Nature of Learning Disability and Arson

It is known that people with learning disabilities are at increased risk of emotional and behavioural disturbances (Reiss, 1982; Clare et al., 1992; Borthwick-Duffy, 1994; Nezu et al., 1992; Cooper, 1997; Caine and Hatton, 1998; Bouras, et al, 1997; Bouras, 1999). As a result they may be at increased risk of committing offences. A number of factors place people with learning disabilities at increased risk:

Communication Difficulties

People with learning disabilities are more vulnerable to language and communication difficulties. Most individuals with learning disabilities experience at least some limitations in expressive and receptive language abilities, understanding the rules governing sentence construction, the meaning of language and in understanding the practical significance of language. This frequently means that the individual has difficulty in expressing their emotions or personal needs verbally and may limit the ability to produce socially effective responses (a factor associated with arson in the literature mentioned earlier). Accordingly, the individual may need to find other ways to communicate their

feelings and needs. Indeed, challenging behaviour is now commonly thought to be a means of communication (Clements, 1998). Setting fires similarly may serve the purpose of communicating distress or dissatisfaction in the absence of other socially effective responses.

Poor Problem Solving Skills

Individuals who have a learning disability may have 'executive functioning' difficulties which affect various areas of problem solving, including strategic planning, working memory, selection of task relevant information, inhibition of task irrelevant information and inhibition of previously used but inappropriate responses. Individuals who lack skills in these areas may demonstrate poor problem solving and inflexibility in coping, leading to further difficulty in responding in socially effective ways (Clements, 1998). Arson may, at least partly, result from an individual's poor ability to plan, to think ahead and to problem solve. It is also likely that difficulties in problem solving have emotional implications, with negative feedback being received when problems are not solved effectively.

Social and Emotional Factors

Disempowerment: People with learning disabilities are one of the most socially devalued and disempowered groups in society, whose members often have little influence over their own lives and environments. They may often feel stigmatised, powerless and suffer from low self esteem (Reiss, 1982; Clare et al., 1992; Nezu et al., 1992). These are factors noted above as associated with fire setting and offending in general.

Additional Disabilities: People with learning disabilities may also be particularly vulnerable to additional disabilities linked to genetic conditions, e.g. facial disfigurements, which may lead to further social rejection, disadvantage, and isolation (Clare et al., 1992). As noted social rejection and isolation have been linked to fire setting.

Loss and Abuse: Individuals with learning disabilities often experience many losses, e.g. moves to and from institutions, rejection from parents and family and therefore may have particularly poor attachment experiences. Individuals with a learning disability are also known to be more likely to suffer abusive experiences (Craft, 1994; Brown and Turk, 1992; ARC/NAPSAC, 1993; McCarthy and Thompson, 1996). A history of multiple losses and abuse are associated with psychological and emotional difficulties (Clements et al., 1999; Craft, 1994; Brown and Turk, 1992; ARC/NAPSAC, 1993; McCarthy and Thompson, 1996) and also have been linked to fire setting (Jackson et al., 1987a)

Social Relationships: People with a learning disability often have limited opportunities to develop and successfully maintain friendships and relationships and this may result in feelings of loneliness and isolation (Clare et al.,1992; Amado, 1993). In turn, this limits opportunities for social support which could act as a protective factor for individuals who experience adversity (Rutter et al., 1998). In addition, it can increase isolation which has been linked to fire setting (Jackson et al., 1987b).

Protective Factors: Research suggests that high intellectual ability is a protective factor in children who experience adversity over time (Bender and Losel, 1996; Dubow and Luster, 1990). It has also been shown to protect against a range of psychosocial and psychopathological outcomes such as mental health difficulties (Cederblad et al., 1994).

Application to Clinical Material

In a single case study of a man with a learning disability who had been charged with arson and was currently resident in a psychiatric setting, Clare et al. (1992) propose the following formulation of his firesetting and hoax calls:

Fig iv <u>Formulation of PR's firesetting and hoax calls</u>
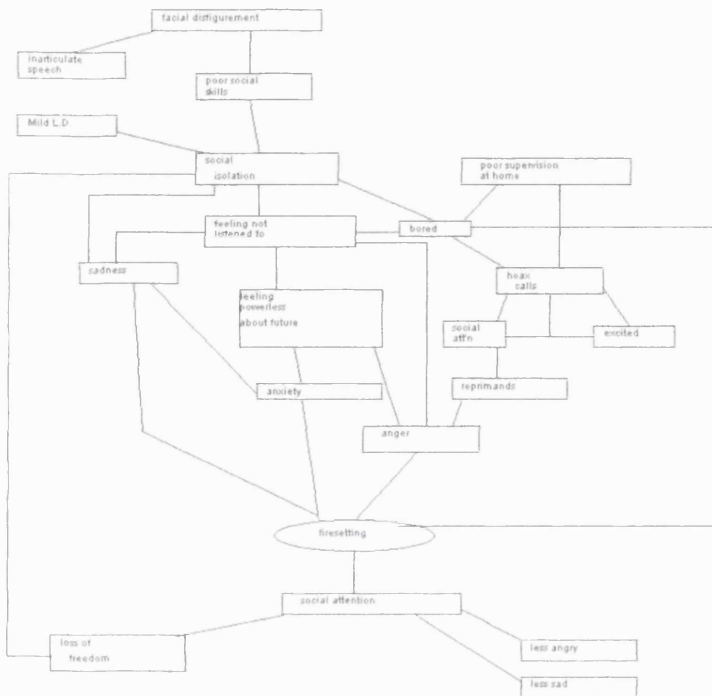
Clare et al. (1992)

Clare et al. (1992) found facial disfigurement caused the man in question to have inarticulate speech and therefore poor social skills. Both this and having a learning disability meant that he was socially isolated and felt sad, bored and not listened to. Poor supervision at home meant he could make hoax calls to the fire brigade and when he did this he felt excited. However, at times he was reprimanded for this which left him feeling angry. He also felt angry about not being listened to and felt anxious and powerless over his future. When he set fires he felt less angry and less sad and gained social attention.   However, his freedom was inhibited and therefore he felt more socially isolated and more powerless about the future. This further reinforced his fire setting.

In another study carried out specifically with individuals with a learning disability, Murphy & Clare (1996) used a functional analysis framework from a cognitive behavioural perspective to assess motivations for arson amongst ten people with mild learning disabilities. Subjects were asked

about their perceptions of events, feelings and cognitions prior to and after setting fires. The results show that some individuals were able to identify their feelings and cognitions prior to fire setting including anger, sadness, depression and not feeling listened to. Identified consequences were reduction in anger and increased social attention. However, individuals were much less reliable at identifying consequences.

The functional analysis model of arson in the general population presented by Jackson et al. (1987a) appears to be a useful model to understand how firesetting behaviour begins and is maintained and to inform treatment. Studies have shown how this model can usefully be applied to formulating arson offending by an individual with a learning disability (Clare et al.; 1992 Clare and Murphy, 1996). Further, the functional analysis of fire setting behaviour by arson offenders who have a learning disability may be useful to inform treatment by allowing comprehensive and individual treatment packages (Clare et al., 1992). The 'model' is perhaps weakest in not allowing clear predictions of who is likely to engage in fire setting, as it identifies a range of relevant factors but does not establish any clear relationships between these.

To date nobody has examined the relevance of many of the factors noted as important to the development of fire setting for learning disabled offenders in a controlled study. Many of the factors which are noted to be important in understanding fire setting in the general population e.g. psychosocial disadvantage, inability to cope with negative emotions, low assertiveness, social isolation and a sense of powerlessness, are strongly associated with having a learning disability. Therefore, one might expect to find strong evidence of these in learning disabled arson offenders and a possible explanation of why arson appears to be more common amongst offenders with a learning disability than in the offender population as a whole.

Present Study

Using quantitative methodology, some of the factors identified as important for the development of arson in the general population are investigated as to whether they are also relevant to individuals with a learning disability who commit arson. Three groups are compared:

i.   **arson offenders** with a learning disability or borderline learning disability (Group 1);

ii.   **offenders** who have committed offences other than arson and who have a learning disability or borderline learning disability (Group 2);

iii.   **non offenders** who have a learning disability or borderline learning disability (Group 3).

All three groups are matched for age, gender and level of ability.

Hypotheses:

A.   Questionnaire Analysis

On the basis of the arson literature it is predicted that:

i.   Arson offenders will have a greater external locus of control than other offenders or non offenders;

Previous studies have found that within the general population, arson offenders rated themselves as having significantly less personal control over their own lives than other offenders (Rice and Harris, 1991; Keval et al., 1989). People with learning disabilties are generally a very powerless group and generally are more likely to experience their world as controlled by powerful others (Wehmeyer, 1993; Wehmeyer et al, 1997). We might expect this effect to be more pronounced amongst people with learning disabilties who have committed arson.

ii.   Arson offenders will be less assertive than other offenders or non offenders;

As noted above, studies within the general population have found that arson offenders rate themselves as significantly less assertive than other offenders (Jackson et al., 1987b; Rice and Harris, 1991). It has been suggested that people with learning disabilities generally have difficulty asserting themselves (Holt, 1994; Wehmeyer et al., 1994) but in line with the literature we would expect this tendancy to be more pronounced in an individual with learning disabilties who has also committed arson.

iii.   Arson offenders will have high levels of trait anger but are more likely to try to express this internally rather than externally compared to other offenders or non offenders;

Within the normal population, high levels of aggressiveness and hostility have been found in arson offenders (Koson and Dvoskin, 1982). However, because arson offenders are thought to be less

assertive (Jackson et al., 1987b), it is hypothesised that they are less likely to express their anger externally;

iv.   **Arson offenders will rate themselves as having less power and significance on a self esteem scale than other offenders or non offenders;**

As noted above within the general population arson offenders rate themselves as having less personal control over their own lives and researchers have suggested that fire setting is attractive to those who feel powerless (Macdonald, 1977). Again, individuals who have learning disabilities generally have little power and control over their lives. However, the experience of powerlessness is likely to be particularly pronounced amongst arson offenders who have learning disabilities;

v.   **Arson offenders will show greater interest or excitation for fire related stimuli than either non-arson offenders or non offending controls;**

Within the normal population it has been suggested that arson offenders have an abnormal fascination with fire (Lewis and Yarnell, 1951; Rice and Harris, 1995).

B.   File Check List

By gathering key data from individuals' records, psychosocial disadvantage and personal disadvantage will be compared across the three groups. On the basis of the literature it is predicted that:

vi.   **There is a greater incidence of early disadvantage including childhood abuse, neglect, loss, parental mental illness and early behaviour problems in the offender groups than in the non offender group;**

Studies have shown that offenders in the normal population experience higher rates of childhood abuse, neglect, and loss than the non offending population (Rutter et al., 1998);

vii. **Arson offenders will have more disabilities, such as facial disfigurements and speech difficulties than other offenders;**

Researchers have suggested that in the normal population arson offenders are more likely to have mild disfigurements or speech defects than other offenders and that this reduces their social effectiveness (Rice and Harris, 1991; Clare et al., 1992);

viii. **Arson offender will have less substance abuse problems than other offenders.**

Previous studies have suggested that arson offenders have less substance abuse difficulties than other offenders in the normal population (Hill, et al., 1982; Jackson, 1987b)

C.   Qualitative Analysis

A qualitative analysis will be carried out on ten in-depth interviews with arson offenders. As well as examining distal and proximal antecedents, and consequences of individual's fire setting in more detail than is possible through the use of questionnaires, the interview also covers individual's own feelings about why they set fires and how they feel about fire in general.

METHOD

Ethical Approval:

Ethical approval for this study was gained from four different ethics committees:

i.   Kneesworth House Hospital Ethics Committee

ii.   Enfield and Haringey Health Authority Local Research Ethics Committee

iii.   West Hertfordshire Health Authority Local Research Ethics Committee

iv.   East London City and Hackney Health Authority Research Ethics Committee

(see appendix 1 for letters confirming ethical approval).

Participants:

Three groups of participants who all functioning in the **mild learning disability or borderline range** (full scale IQ of 60-79) took part in this study:

Group i.   arson offenders;

Group ii.   offenders who had not committed arson; and

Group iii.   non offenders.

There were 15 individuals (11 men and 4 women) in each group. The groups were matched for age and gender. Each group consisted of:

*   5 males aged 20-30

*   5 males aged 30-40

*   1 male aged over 50

*   4 females aged 20-40

Group 1 - Arson Group: The arson sample consisted of individuals resident in three different medium secure units who had committed arson. Participants were not included if they had not repeatedly engaged in fire setting. Evidence has shown that having set one fire, most individuals

are unlikely to set another fire. However, once more than one fire is set it is more likely that a pattern of pathological firesetting will emerge (Rice and Harris, 1991). Therefore participants who had set only one fire e.g. accidentally, were not included in this study. The arson sample consisted of those who volunteered to take part. All individuals in this group were currently on a psychiatric or forensic section of the Mental Health Act, (1983). Twelve of the arson offenders had received either group or individual therapy which focused on their arson offending. Of the 10 arson offender followed up for a second interview 8 were British, 1 was South African and 1 was Afro-carribean.

Group 2 - 'Other Offender' Group: This sample consisted of individuals none of whom, to the author's knowledge, had committed arson in the past. Offences which participants in this group had committed were violent offences (n=5) and sexual offences (n=10). All individuals in this group resided in medium secure units. Apart from one woman who was on a locked ward in a psychiatric hospital, all individuals in this group were currently on a psychiatric or forensic section of the Mental Health Act (1983) as a result of being charged with an offence.

Group 3 - Non-Offender Group (Controls): This group consisted of individuals who, to the author's knowledge, had not committed any offences. In addition this group did not have any diagnosed psychiatric problems. Although not all participants in this group had been formally assessed, service providers believed they had mild or borderline learning difficulties. Therefore, although the author had tried to match groups on all criteria where possible, this sample was not as rigorously matched on I.Q.

Recruiting participants:

1.	Arson offenders and other offenders were recruited from a wide geographical area including all medium secure units for people with learning disabilities in North London. Within each unit the researcher recruited exhaustively. All arson offenders with learning disabilities or borderline learning disabilities were approached unless they were regarded as unsuitable for the

study (i.e. experiencing acute mental health problems of such severity that they would interfere with the ability to complete quesionnaires or in-depth interview). Participants were identified by liaising with the psychology and psychiatry departments from four medium secure institutions.

In the event all arson offenders identified for the study had been diagnosed as functioning in the mild learning diabilities or borderline learning disability range. There were no arson offenders with moderate or severe learning disabilities in any of the units.

2.   Non-offending controls were identified by liaising with a multi-disciplinary community health team for people with learning disabilities, day centres, a housing association and a leisure organisation for people with learning disabilities.

3.   Sample sizes were very small, despite exhaustive recruiting as the number of arson offenders with a learning disability is relatively small. However, this small number of arson offenders are regarded as very dangerous due to the serious nature of their offence.

4.   An information sheet about the research (see appendix 2) was forwarded to potential participants and their carers. This allowed potential participants to discuss with trusted staff whether they wished to take part before they were approached by the researcher who was then introduced by a trusted member of staff. This approach was adopted to ensure informed consent, given that it is known that people with learning disabilities, are particularly likely to have fears about the purpose of any research, of meeting the interviewer, or they may feel obliged to take part in the research because of the large power imbalance and frequent past negative experiences (Atkinson, 1988).

As a further safeguard, the researcher completed a series of questions with individuals who agreed to take part (see appendix 2), developed from a series of questions described by Arscott et al (1998). Their purpose was to ensure that individuals understood what they were being asked to do, possible benefits and risks of taking part and how they could stop the interview if they wished.

The researcher and the participant then both signed a consent form (see appendix 2).

Sample Size:

To gain a large effect size at 80% power, it would be necessary to have had between 21 to 39 participants in each of the three research groups, that is, 63 to 117 participants in total (Cohen, 1992). Although a power analysis using previous studies of assertiveness and locus of control amongst arson offenders suggest much smaller samples, (i.e. 10 to 15 participants in each group) (Jackson et al., 1987a; Keval, et al. 1989), this should be treated with much caution. These studies compared arson offenders specifically with 'violent' offenders (as opposed to simply 'other' offenders as in this study) and did not include arson offenders with a learning disability, they are therefore unlikely to provide an accurate estimation of the numbers necessary for sufficient power in this study.

Due to the small number of arson offenders with learning disabilities that exist, the researcher was able to access only 15 of these offenders who were willing to take part in this study despite recruiting exhaustively over a wide geographical area. Although it would have been ideal to have had a bigger sample, this would have involved recruiting over an even larger geographical area and would have been beyond the scope of this study. Participants were matched across the three groups, therefore there were 15 participants in each group and the total sample was 45.

Refusals: Of fifty six potential participants approached, eleven declined to take part in the study. These were fairly equally spread across the three groups.

Dropouts: One arson offender dropped out of the study after completing one questionnaire for reasons not connected with the research. Two offender controls completed two questionnaires and did not wish to continue with the study, without giving specific reasons. All of the controls completed all of the questionnaires.

Measures:

Questionnaires:

Five questionnaires were completed with all participants:

1. Locus of Control Scale (Norwicki, 1976)

This is a 40 item scale which measures the extent to which an individual feels that they have control over their life (see appendix 3). The individual answers 'yes' or 'no' to a series of statements such as 'can you stop yourself from catching a cold?'. High scores (> 19) indicate 'externality' i.e. that the individual feels their life is controlled by external factors. Although this measure was not specifically developed for individuals who have a learning disability, factor analyses have shown that the factor structures and the construct validity is similar for individuals with and without a learning disability. It is therefore regarded as a valid measure for this group (Wehmeyer et al, 1993).

2. Assertiveness Scale (Gambrill & Richey, 1975)

A suitable assertiveness inventory devised for use specifically amongst the learning disability population was not available. Therefore an adapted 25-item assertion inventory was devised based on 'the Assertion Inventory' developed by Gambrill & Richey (1975) (see appendix 3). The inventory requires individuals to report how much discomfort or worry they would feel if required to be assertive in different situations (discomfort scale) and the probability that they would engage in the assertive behaviour (likelihood scale). A Likert scale with symbols and pictures was used to measure each of these scales (see appendix 3). A greater score on the discomfort scale indicates greater discomfort and a greater score on the likelihood scale indicates greater likelihood of engaging in the behaviour. However, likelihood scores were inverted so that greater overall scores indicate less assertiveness.

Items from the original questionnaire were omitted if they consisted of situations that individuals with learning disabilities might be unlikely to encounter (e.g. turn down a request to borrow your car). The phrasing of items was also changed to make them easier for individuals with learning disabilities to understand (e.g. 'Admit ignorance in some areas' was changed to 'tell people when you don't understand something').

Since the questionnaire was adapted and was being used to compare between three groups no 'cut off 'score was used. Higher scores indicate less assertiveness.

3.   State Trait Anger Inventory (Spielberger,1988)

This is a well respected 57-item tool which measures anger experienced by individuals and characteristic styles of coping with anger (see appendix 3). The inventory consists of six scales:

i.   *State Anger* - measures the intensity of angry feelings and the extent to which an individual feels like expressing anger *at the time of the interview*;

ii.   *Trait Anger* - measures how often angry feelings are experienced over time.

iii.   *Anger Expression/Out* - measures the extent to which anger is expressed outwardly in verbally or physically aggressive behaviour, e.g. "when I am angry, I say nasty things".

iv.   *Anger Expression/In Scale* - measures the extent to which angry feelings are experienced but not expressed (suppressed), e.g. "when I am angry I boil inside, but I do not show it"

v.   *Anger Control/In* - measures how often a person attempts to control angry feelings by calming down or cooling off, e.g. "when I am angry I try to relax"

vi.   *Anger Control/out* - measures how often a person controls the outward expression of angry feelings, e.g. "when I am angry I say nasty things".

The individual rates how often they experience items on a 4 point Likert scale which was presented pictorially (see appendix 3). Although the instrument was not devised for a learning disability population, an assessment which was specifically designed to measure how individuals with a learning disability deal with anger was not available. Spielberger (1988) recommends it is

appropriate for individuals who have a reading age of '6th grade' (around age 11 years). In the current study the researcher read out the questions and wrote down the answers given by the participants in order to ease completion of the questionnaire for participants. In addition, any concepts which participants found difficult were explained until the researcher felt certain that the individual had understood the meaning of the question.

4.   Social Comparison Scale (Szivos-Bach, 1993)

This questionnaire was devised for individuals with a learning disability and measures factors thought to be important for self-esteem including feelings of self-competence, self power or significance and self-virtue or value (Coopersmith,1967) (see appendix 3). Items (e.g. "I have good ideas") are measured using a Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The item scores make up three sub-scales: power/significance, virtue/value, and competence. The individual is asked to identify three comparison figures: their sibling; a best friend; ideal self (how they would like to be like). A set of person shaped counters are then labelled with the name of the individual and the comparison figures. As well as rating themselves on items, the individual is also asked to rate their comparison figures on the test items. The test produces the following scores:

a.   Total Scores:

i) Total me Score (which is a measure of the individual's self esteem), ii). Total me - friend score, iii). Total me - sibling score, iv). Total me - ideal score (which are a measure of how much the individual holds themselves in esteem compared to comparison figures) (a best friend, sibling, ideal self). Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem.

b.   Power Scores:

v.) Total me power Score (A measure of how much power or significance the individual feels they have), vi.) Power me - friend score, vii.) Power me - sibling score, viii.) Power me - ideal score (a measure of how much power/significance the individual feels they have compared to comparison figures). Higher scores indicate higher self esteem.

c.   Virtue Scores:

ix.) Total me virtue/value Score (A measure of how much virtue/value the individual feels they have, with higher scores indicating greater virtue), x.) Virtue me - friend score, xi.) Virtue me - sibling score, xii.) Virtue me - ideal score, (a measure of how much virtue the individual feels they have compared to comparison figures). Higher scores indicate higher self esteem.

d.   Competence Scores:

xiii.) Total me competence Score (A measure of how much competence the individual feels they have, with higher scores indicating greater competence) xiv.) Competence me - friend score, xv.) Competence me - sibling score, xvi.) Competence me - ideal score (a measure of how much competence the individual feels they have compared to comparison figures (a best friend, sibling, ideal self). Higher scores indicate higher self esteem.

5.   Fire Interest Rating Scale (Murphy and Clare (1996)

This scale was specifically designed for individuals with a learning disability and measures the extent to which individuals find fire and fire related stimuli exiting or fascinating (see appendix 3). The individual is required to rate on a 5 point Likert scale how they feel about 15 fire related scenarios (e.g. "watching a man with his clothes on fire" or "seeing the firemen get their equipment ready") from 'very exciting/nice' to 'very upsetting'. The higher an individual's total score, the greater the individual's interest or excitement with fire and fire related paraphernalia.

Response Scales:

All Likert response scales were presented using visual analogue scales (see appendix 3). Representing scales in this way has been shown to increase the validity of responses amongst the learning disability population where language based or abstract concepts may otherwise be difficult to understand (Dagnan et al, 1995; Clare, 1993).

Qualitative Interview Schedule:

This was designed by the researcher (see appendix 3). Influenced by Jackson et al. (1987a), the interview schedule drew on a functional analysis framework to provide a general structure for exploring in depth the setting conditions, triggers and consequences of the individual's fire setting. As well as providing a useful framework to understand relationships between events, cognitions, feelings and behaviours, a functional analysis framework also allowed more focused questions which are less difficult for people with learning disabilities to answer than open-ended questions (Atkinson, 1988; Flynn, 1986). The interview also included more open general questions, such as "How do you feel about fire?" and "Why do you think you set fires?", in order to allow more open exploration of what participants viewed as important factors in the causation and maintenance of their fire setting.

The questions used simple language and were phrased in an open ended manner. Most individuals who have good verbal expressive skills and a mild level of learning disability should be able to answer such questions (Flynn, 1986; Lindsay et al, 1994; Prosser and Bromley, 1997). This style of questioning reduces acquiescence, a well known phenomenon which can occur in interviews with learning disabled individuals (Flynn, 1986; Atkinson, 1988). The interview questions were designed to be fairly general so that individuals could say as much as they wished. This is a useful way of eliciting rich information from individuals who have a learning disability (Flynn, 1986; Atkinson, 1988) and enables them to 'tell their story'. The interview began with less probing and personal questions (such as 'why do other people set fires'), then moved on to more personally relevant (and probing) questions towards the middle of the interview (such as questions about the respondent's childhood). The interview ended with questions about the respondent's hopes and plans for the future. This style of questioning helps the respondent to feel at ease and helps to build rapport before moving onto potentially more sensitive questions (Atkinson, 1988; Prosser and Bromley, 1997).

File Questionnaire

A file check list was devised to gain information from files about the presence or absence of factors which have been identified in the arson literature as important to the development of fire setting behaviour, including psychosocial history and psychiatric diagnoses (see appendix 3).

Procedure:

Quantitative Measures

All questionnaires were completed on a one to one basis. Offenders were seen individually in a private room within the respective secure units. Non offenders were seen either in their homes or place of work. The familiarity of these places helped to make sure that individuals felt more relaxed about being interviewed and therefore is likely to have increased the validity of responses (Flynn, 1986). The interviewer maintained an open and friendly style throughout the completion of the measures, which is said to help reduce suggestibility (Bull, 1995). The questionnaires were completed in one or two sessions with each of the participants. Each session lasted between 20 minutes and 1 hour. At the end of each questionnaire the interviewer checked with the participant how they felt and if they wished to continue. Participants were able to have a drink or a short break in between questionnaires if they felt they needed to. After completing the questionnaires participants were thanked for their participation and were asked if they had any questions. participants were asked how they had felt completing the research. They were reminded of the confidential nature of the research, but were asked if there was anything *they* wished the researcher to feed back to staff.

Qualitative Interviews

Arson offenders were asked if they were willing to do a second interview. They were told that, if they agreed, the researcher would ask them in a lot more detail about their childhood, their relationships, their arson offending and what their hopes were for the future. They were informed that this interview would be tape recorded but that only the researcher would listen to the tape

recordings. Again, they were reminded of the confidential nature of the research. Ten out of the fifteen arson offenders agreed to participate in a more in-depth interview.

Before the qualitative interviews began, the researcher again reminded participants of the confidential nature of the research and sought consent to begin tape recording. Nine of the individuals completed the interview, one participant completed about half the interview and then requested a break. Due to events beyond the researcher's control it was not possible to complete this interview. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

File Check List

The researcher studied each of the offenders' nursing and medical notes for reported presence or absence of certain factors listed on the file check list (e.g. sexual abuse). Only six of the non offenders had files to which the researcher could gain access, therefore the researcher asked each of the non offender participants whether the factors on the file questionnaire had been present or absent in their life. Although there was no other available access to non-offenders' histories, obviously asking individuals themselves about sensitive issues in their history has implications for the results. Therefore check list results for non offenders should be treated with some caution.

Analyses

Quantitative Data

The results of the three groups on the questionnaires were compared using a one way analysis of variance.

Factors noted as present or absent from file check lists were calculated as a percentage of the whole group. Chi-square tests were carried out to see if the differences between the groups with regard to presence or absence of these factors were significant.

Analysis of in-depth interviews

Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and the researcher then analysed these transcripts using a qualitative approach influenced by the principles of grounded theory as laid out by Henwood and Pidgeon, (1996).

The rationale for this method was to allow an analysis of firesetting broadly within a functional analysis framework but which is also grounded in the data provided by the interviews. A functional analysis framework offers a useful indicator of areas for investigation, treatment and further research (Jackson et al., 1987a and b; 1994). In addition, analysing the data guided by the principles of grounded theory allows for the emergence of wider contextual issues and new theoretical concepts related to firesetting. These might be overlooked within a purely behavioural framework concentrating on antecedents, behaviours and consequences.

I outline the method adopted below and illustrate how it was used in this study using an example of the development of one researcher category:

i.   Transcription of data

During the first stage of analysis the taped interviews were transcribed to provide a permanent record of the interview data. This process involves identifying the aspects of the interview that were pertinent to the study and allowed a record of this data that was readily accessible during analysis.

ii.   Open Coding I

During the initial open coding process I analysed the transcripts and tentatively labelled concepts or meaning units within the text that appeared to have some significance to firesetting or the lives of firesetters. These units were then grouped together based on their shared meaning and were labelled and numbered on different sheets of paper. A group of these units which shared the meaning of 'anger' is shown below:

<u>Anger:</u>

"Some people might be angry, you've released you anger and it's one big bang" (p5).

"They set fire, then they can get their anger out" (p2),

"They could be angry or depressed, it might make it less" (p10),

" It's like expression, it was good because all my anger was in the fire and when the fire exploded, my anger exploded with it, so instead of taking it out on someone else, the fire took it out for me" (p1)

"I was upset and angry, I'd just had an argument with my mum" (p7).

"I was angry so I set fire to the house" (p4)

"I stormed off and set grass fires, it was as soon as I felt angry" (p9).

iii.   Open Coding II

The second phase of open coding involved re-grouping these meaning units which reflected a common theme to create member categories. A member category of 'negative feelings before firesetting' was developed which incorporated the theme of 'anger':

<u>Negative Feelings Before Firesetting:</u>

i.) anger; ii.) boredom; iii.) rejection; iv.) wanting revenge.

At this stage the data was examined for similarities and differences. When data emerged which did not seem to fit into a category, a new category was created.

iv.   Category Integration

As member categories increased they were refined, extended and related to each other to develop 'researcher categories', which were still grounded in the data but also involved some abstraction at a theoretical level. Throughout this stage, comments and "hunches" of the researcher were recorded on 'memos' (slips of paper) to stimulate further theorising. The member category of

'negative feelings before firesetting' was split during this process into four researcher categories (i.)Arguments; ii.) feeling rejected and unheard; iii.) boredom; and iv.) release of tension. The researcher categories are presented in the results that follow, together with definitions of these categories and supporting meaning units (quotes).

At every stage of the qualitative analysis, the emergent themes and categories were cross checked with a clinical psychologist experienced in the field of learning disabilities to enhance reliability.

RESULTS

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The data was analysed using the statistical package SPSS-9.

Parametric tests assume normal distribution of data, therefore the data was analysed for skewness/kurtosis of distribution. Where skewness was detected, a non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis analysis of variance was carried out as this does not assume normal distribution.

A negative skewness was detected for all subject groups on the State Anger sub-scale of the State Trait Anger Inventory. A positive skewness was detected for non offenders on the Total Self compared with Friend (Discrepancy Scores)

NB: As noted in the method, though the author recruited exhaustively, sample sizes were rather small (n=15). Although many differences are found between the groups in the direction expected, these are not always statistically significant. At least in some instances this lack of statistical significance may result from small sample sizes, and therefore a lack of statistical power, rather than a lack of clinically relevant differences. The results should be read bearing this in mind.

1.   Locus of Control

Locus of Control Scores were calculated for interviewees in the three groups: Arson offenders (1), Other offenders (2), Non-offenders (3). Group means and Standard Deviation Scores are presented in the table below. A one way analysis of variance between the three groups found significant differences between the group means.

	Group 1 Mean (S.D.)	Group 2 Mean (S.D)	Group 3 Mean (S.D.)	ANOVA F
Locus of Control Scores	20.73 (2.9)	15.6 (2.3)	16.7 (3.7)	9.846**

(NB. a score or 18 or above indicates 'externality':
** significant at 0.01% level of significance)

Using Bonferoni post-hoc comparisons significant differences were found between group mean scores on Locus of Control between Group1 and Group 2 (p<0.01), and Group 1 and Group 3 (p<0.01). No significant difference was found between group 2 and Group 3 means.

The results indicate that group 1 gain significantly greater scores on the locus of control scale than either Group 2 or 3. The results also indicate that Group 1 gain significantly greater scores than group 2 on this measure. These results suggest therefore, that arson offenders are more likely than the other two groups to have an external locus of control.

2.   Assertiveness

Assertiveness scores were calculated for interviewees in the three groups. Scores consisted of 2 subscales and a total assertiveness score:

i.   likelihood of being assertive in situations (lik.);

ii.   anxiety at being assertive in situations (Anx.);

iii.   total i. and ii (Tot.).

An Analysis of Variance was also carried out between the three groups for each of the subscales (see table below).

Assertiveness Scale

	Group 1 Mean (S.D.)	Group 2 Mean (S.D.)	Group 3 Mean (S.D.)	ANOVA F
Lik.	76.6 (15.6)	77.9 (18.7)	82.0 (12.6)	1.276 n.s.
Anx.	63.5 (13.9)	56.3 (11.3)	56.3 (12.7)	1.276 n.s.
Tot.	138.7 (23.6)	133.87 (21.5)	138.27 (22.8)	2.070 n.s.

(Lower scores = higher anxiety)

A one way analysis of variance found no significant differences between the three group means on any of the sub-scales of the assertiveness scale. The above results suggest then that there are no significant differences on anxiety about being assertive, likelihood of being assertive and total

assertiveness between the three groups in this study. In particular, arson offenders were found to be no less assertive than the other two groups in this study. As there were no standardised norms, it is not possible to say what score would represent low assertiveness.

3. Fire Interest Rating Scale

Fire Interest Rating Scale scores were calculated for the three groups. An analysis of variance was carried out between the groups.

Fire Interest Rating Scale

Group 1 Mean (S.D.)	Group 2 Mean (S.D.)	Group 3 Mean (S.D.)	ANOVA F
45.07 (8.9)	36.43 (4.9)	37.2 (5.5)	7.514**

(** Significant at the 0.01% Level of Significance).

The analysis of Variance found significant differences between the group means. Using Bonferoni post-hoc comparisons significant differences were found between group 1 and 2 means (p<0.01), and group 1 and 3 means (p=<0.01). No significant difference was found between group 2 and 3 means.

Therefore, Arson offenders show significantly higher scores on the Fire Interest Rating Scale than either other offenders or non offenders in this sample.

4. State - Trait Anger Inventory (STAXI)

State-Trait Anger Inventory scores were calculated for interviewees in the three groups. An analysis of variance was carried out between the three groups for each of the sub-scales on the STAXI (see table below).

	STAXI Group 1 Mean (S.D.)	Group 2 Mean (S.D.)	Group 3 Mean (S.D.)	ANOVA F
State Ang.	19.93 (12.07)	19.00 (7.2)	15.80 (2.8)	1.383 n.s.
Trait Ang.	21.80 (9.3)	20.80 (7.4)	17.50 (6.1)	1.255 n.s.
Exp. Out	17.13 (5.9)	18.69 (5.6)	13.47 (4.8)	3.391 *
Exp. In	21.47 (5.2)	18.08 (6.6)	17.93 (4.2)	2.304 n.s.
Cont. Out	20.07 (6.1)	22.08 (6.2)	23.27 (6.7)	0.969 n.s.
Cont. In	21.53 (6.8)	23.54 (6.4)	24.00 (6.0)	0.624 n.s.

(* Significant at the 0.05% level of significance)

No significant differences between the means of the three groups on 'State Anger'. However, all three groups were found to be skewed to the left. Therefore, a Kruskal-Wallis test was carried out as this does not assume normal distribution. No significant differences were found between the means of the three groups: $p = < 0.116$.

The one way analysis of variance on 'Outward Expression of Anger' found significant differences between the means of the three groups ($p < 0.04$). Using a Bonferoni post-hoc comparison significant differences were found between group 2 and 3 means on 'Outward Expression of Anger' ($p < 0.05$). No other pairwise comparison was significant on this sub-scale.

No other significant differences were found between the mean scores of the three groups on the the State Trait Anger Inventory.

Summary

These results suggest that there are no significant differences between arson offenders, other offenders and controls on levels of state or trait anger. Non offenders rate themselves as being

significantly less likely to express their anger outwardly than offenders who have not committed arson. Non offenders also rate themselves as less likely to express their anger outwardly than arson offenders, however, this was not found to be significant at the 0.05% significance level. Arson offenders and other offenders show no significant differences in their reported outward expression of anger.

Group means, as predicted, suggest a trend for arson offenders to be more likely than either other offenders or controls to express their anger internally. However this was not found to be significant at the 0.05% level of significance. In addition, the results suggest that arson offenders, other offenders and controls show no differences on the likelihood of controlling external or internal expression of anger.

5.   Social Comparison Self Esteem Scale

A one way analysis of variance was carried out between groups and found no significant differences between the means of the three groups on total self esteem or on the total power/significance, virtue, and competence sub-scales of the social comparison scale. An analysis of variance between the groups on discrepancy scores between self and others found significant differences between groups on how favourably individuals compared themselves to siblings on the social comparison scale.

Social Comparison Self Esteem Scale

	Group 1 Mean (S.D.)	Group 2 Mean (S.D.)	Group 3 Mean (S.D.)	ANOVA F
Total	90.53 (17.18)	95.62 (23.82)	96.33 (16.61)	0.58 n.s.
Power	27.93 (6.00)	29.92 (5.90)	29.67 (5.89)	0.52 n.s.
Virtue	24.27 (3.90)	23.35 (3.86)	25.07 (3.60)	0.69 n.s.
Competence	28.2 (6.60)	30.92 (6.57)	30.80 (5.83)	0.95 n.s.

Discrepancy Scores

	Group 1 Mean (S.D.)	Group 2 Mean (S.D.)	Group 3 Mean (S.D.)	ANOVA. F
Friend	-10.67 (17.02)	-8.54 (10.21)	-0.21 (14.57)	5.63 n.s.
Sibling	-25.47 (13.50)	-19.46 (11.81)	-4.93 (11.23)	3.30 *
Ideal Self	-25.47 (18.89)	-19.46 (9.93)	-15.50 (11.55)	1.81 n.s.

(Greater negative discrepancy scores = lower self esteem)
(* significant at the 0.05% level of significance)

As there was a significant difference between the three groups on discrepancy scores between self and sibling, a Bonferoni post-hoc comparison was carried out between groups and found a significant difference between group 1 and 3 means ($p < 0.05\%$). No significant differences were found between group 2 and 3 means or 1 and 2 means.

The results suggest that arson offenders in this sample experienced significantly more discrepancy between themselves and a sibling than controls. In addition, arson offenders also appear to be more likely (than other offenders or controls) to perceive themselves negatively compared to a friend and this was approaching significance.

FILE QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS

Results of the file questionnaire analysis are presented below. For each group a percentage of the total subject group who had experienced each variable is presented. In addition a chi-square analysis of the difference between the three groups is presented.

	Grp 1	Grp 2	Grp 3	Chi-Square X
Victim of Abuse:	100%	100%	6.7%	35.90**
i. physical abuse	81.8%	100%	6.7%	17.98**
ii. sexual abuse	69.2%	61.5%	0.0%	16.91**
iii. neglect	53.8%	30.8%	0.0%	10.44**
Drug/Alcohol Abuse	33.30%	50.0%	6.7%	6.39*
Early Losses:	80.0%	90.9%	20%	17.00**
i. significant periods in care	53.8%	54.5%	6.7%	9.05**
ii. death of close relative	28.6%	36.4%	13.3%	1.94 n.s.
Significant mental health problems or learning disabilities in parents:	73.3%	63.6%	13.3%	12.13**
Other Disabilities	20.0%	50.0%	46.7%	3.27 n.s.
Self Injury	53.3%	54.5%	0.0%	12.27**
Schooling:				
i. Truancy	91.7%	83.3%%	20.0%	17.95**
ii. Suspension/Exp.	58.3%	46.7%	6.7%	10.41**
Paid employment or work scheme	69.2%	80.0%	85.7%	1.10 n.s.
Childhood Problems:	mean 3.5	mean: 3.0	mean: 0.5	33.45**
Mental Health	53.3%	83.3%	-	2.70 n.s.

(** significant at 0.01% level of signficance)
(* significant at 0.05% level of significance)
(*Criteria for Categories can be found in Appendix 4*)

There were no significant differences between the two offender groups on any of the above variables.

There were significant differences between non offenders and both groups of offenders on several target variables. Both offender groups were significantly more likely to have experienced abuse, early losses, parental mental illness, self injury, mean number of childhood problems, truancy and suspensions or expulsions from school.

Although there were significant differences between group 2 and group 3 on drug and alcohol use (Chi-Sq. (1) = 6.52, p < 0.01) there were no significant differences between group 1 and group 3 (Chi-Sq. (1) = 3.33, p < 0.07). This suggests that non offenders have significantly less alcohol problems than other offenders, but not arson offenders.

Qualitative Analysis:

The researcher categories that follow are organised into four 'higher order categories' (see below):

Firesetting - Qualitative Categories

1. Childhood Experiences

i) Abusive Experiences; ii) Neglect; iii) Feeling Abandoned; iv) Sense of Being Different; v) Early Behaviour Problems; iv) Parents as Good Figures.

2. Antecedents of Firesetting

i) Arguments; ii) Feeling Rejected and Unheard; iii) Boredom; iv) Psychosis.

3. Personal Circumstances

i) Lack of Supportive Relationships; ii) Drug and Alcohol Misuse; .

4. Beliefs About Firesetting

i) Naivety; ii) 'Getting away with it'.

5. Planning

6. Motivations and Maintaining Factors for Firesetting

i) Excitement and Pleasure; ii) Release of Tension and Anger; iii) Gaining Power; iv) Wish to Belong and be Important; v) Getting Help.

1.   <u>Childhood Experiences</u>

This researcher category covers childhood experiences that arson offenders described. Overall experiences described by participants were very negative. When asked about their childhood, interviewees described experiencing feelings of sadness, anger, fear, helplessness and powerlessness as children.

> **"I was quite unhappy, I was sad and angry when I was younger"**
> **(p1).**

> **"I was so scared that she was going to hit me with the belt" (p10).**

> **"When you looked back at it, at the end of the day, I've got no choice. I can't argue**
> **with them. You've got no choice, at the end of the day, I had no say" [talking about**
> **foster carers] (p3).**

One individual described locking himself in a small cupboard and hiding when he was upset.

> **"I used to go upstairs to my room and lock myself in my room or in my wardrobe.**
> **[I: when you felt sad?] Yes. I used to lock myself in the hatch, you know in the**
> **wardrobe. There's a clip so that you can close it from inside" (p1).**

Hiding when upset is often related to being ashamed of feeling this way, which results from having emotions and experiences 'invalidated' as a child when upset (Linehan, 1995).

In particular, within this category, participants described abusive experiences and experiences of being totally unwanted. Six themes seemed to fall within this category:

1i.   Abusive Experiences

Most participants described experiencing some kind of abuse. Experiences cited were often very severe and included physical abuse, sexual abuse and emotional abuse. This is supported by data taken from interviewees' files which confirm that <u>all</u> of the arson offenders were the victims of abuse or neglect as children.

With regard to physical abuse, interviewees described experiences such as being grabbed by the hair and beaten with objects by a more powerful other, most often the father. Some participants described being beaten so badly that they suffered bruises or even broken bones. Interviewees also described witnessing physical abuse against other members of the family, most commonly father beating mother. In addition, physical abuse was described by some interviewees as being related to alcohol abuse. Some participants described feeling powerless to do anything about this physical abuse and were left with negative feelings such as sadness and anger. One participant described very clearly fantasising about revenge on their abuser, feeling powerless to do anything themselves in reality but finding pleasure in the idea that their abuser may become hurt in some other way or imagining themselves causing their abuser harm.

> "My old man used to beat me up and that. He used to grab me by the hair and sometimes used to pull me across the floor and hit me with an iron pole" (p1).

> "With my real dad that was beating my mum, I was actually inside her when he was doing it" (p2)

> "I've always wanted to get revenge on my dad. Maybe one day he's going to come across this woman, yeah, whose gonna weigh into him. I hope I'm there to see it as well [laughs]" (p1).

Interviewees also reported many instances of sexual abuse perpetrated against themselves or against siblings. Perpetrators were often family members or other individuals where the arson offender was living.

> "I was taken away because my dad sexually abused my brothers and sisters. That is not one thing you go parading around the streets about" (p3).

> "He [stepfather] tried to have sex with me and I told the police" (p4).

When experiencing abuse in childhood, the victim is usually powerless to do anything to stop the abuse and is often left with feelings of helplessness, powerlessness and anger (Briere, 1992; Brown and Fikelhor, 1986; Jehu, 1992). In addition, sexual abuse has been linked to feelings of betrayal, stigmatisation, guilt and shame (Finkelhor and Browne, 1986; Gilbert and Andrews, 1998). For

interviewees in this study being abused and the experiences surrounding the abuse led to feelings of confusion and guilt, anger and self blame and suicide attempts.

> **"I was abusing a boy and a boy was abusing me. They put me in a secure unit for my own safety. I went and took an overdose" (p5).**

Most abuse was not disclosed or the victim was not believed when it was disclosed. Following disclosure some individuals were rejected by members of their family or were returned to an abusive situation.

> **"It went to court but I lost it all. You know they make you look like you are the guilty one. I felt the guilty one you know. They were saying that I've wasted police time and that you enjoyed it and everything. You know they made me look guilty because my head was all puzzled up. I didn't know my left from my right, but that is his fault because he fucked my head up completely you know, it's terrible. She [mother] disowned me at first, she didn't want to know me" (p4).**

> **"We told our dad about it [abuse from stepmother] but he believed her" (p2).**

Many of the individuals in this study had been placed into care or foster homes, often to escape abusive experiences at home. Although placing children in care is intended as a protective strategy, participants described that as children they themselves had little control over this process and often ended up feeling more confused, powerless, bewildered and distressed. As has been noted in the literature (Brown and Finkelhor, 1986; Briere, 1992; Jehu, 1992;) the relationship between victim and abuser is often a very complex and complicated one, above all, when the abuser is the victim's parent. Some participants described a sense of attachment to their abuser as a child, wanting to remain in contact with an abusive parent. Once received into care some interviewees described suffering further traumatic and abusive experiences, including sexual abuse by other children, sexually abusing others, and bullying.

> **"I was gutted, I didn't know what was going on. I was in one [children's home] from 11 to 16. I've been from one place to another, it's not nice to go through" (p3).**

> **"I was happy down there a bit [foster care], but it was too far away from my dad to come and see me and that" (p2).**

"Then I went to a ... hospital and started being inappropriate with patients and they threw me out of there and I went home....... I was in care that November. They put me in a secure unit for my own safety....... Then I went to Banardos .....then I went home .... then back to Banardos. Then into a secure unit again then I went to Banardos and then I went into an adolescent unit. I got chucked out of there and then I went back to Banardos. I was put back in a secure unit (p5).

Some interviewees believed in a link between experiences of abuse and setting fires.

"I was getting beaten up by him so I just went out and started fires because I wanted to get away from them" (p2).

".... with abuse, things like that, if they can't get the help that they ask for then they set a fire" (p4).

1.ii.   Neglect:

Interviewees' descriptions of their parents often contained elements of neglect.   Some participants described their parents as not providing enough money to clothe and feed them, or parents using their child allowance to pay for alcohol.   Some interviewees said that, as a result they engaged in shoplifting to obtain food to satisfy their hunger.   Interviewees also reported being left alone as children and coming to physical harm whilst parents went drinking or waiting outside pubs for parents to finish drinking, and feeling uncertain and anxious.   Some interviewees related experiences of neglect to their parents' mental health difficulties.

"He [father] wasn't clothing me, he expected my mum to feed him on the kids' money" (p1)

"When I was growing up and that, I started knicking things from shops because I didn't have no money and I wanted something to eat" (p2).

"she [mother] had a nervous breakdown and couldn't handle us" (p2).

1.iii.   Feeling Abandoned

Some interviewees felt ignored, abandoned or rejected by those who were supposed to be caring for them as children, including parents and services. Experiences included being abandoned by a

parent because of family feuds and wanting to live with one parent but being kept from doing so by the other parent. One subject directly related his resulting anger at one of his parents to 'doing silly things'. For several participants such experiences led to feeling disliked and unwanted by, or like an outcast in, the family and feeling totally rejected, like noone cared for them at all.

"I grew up as if I had no father. He wouldn't care if I won a medal. He wouldn't care if he found me dead" (p1).

"She pulled out in the middle of the road and drove off [talks about mother leaving after family feud] and that's when I got angry at my dad and started doing silly things" (p2),

"I was in children's homes because mum couldn't stand me" (p6).

"She [mother] would drop us off and come back on Sunday to pick us up. Then, one day she dropped us off and didn't come back to pick us up" (p3).

1.iv. Sense of Being Different

Many of the interviewees described experiences of feeling different to others, not quite good enough and not being accepted by socially accepted groups. Childhood relationships were often marked by an inability to make friends and being excluded, bullied or victimised by others. Interviewees were often unaware why they found it hard to make friends or why they had been bullied. However, in a society which values intellectual prowess, children and adults with learning disabilities are particularly likely to be victimised and excluded.

"There were 6 others that used to [get in trouble at school] but they never got pulled in. I thought that the headmaster was out to get me." (p9)

"[I: Did you have friends at school?] No. I used to hang around with [sister] and her friends. (p8)

[I: Do you find it hard or easy to make friends?] Hard in the past but easy now [I: what made it hard in the past?] I don't know, hard to talk to people"(p10).

"Half of them [boyfriends] told me the truth, that they felt more attraction to [sister] than me" (p8).

"I kept getting beaten up and they kept taking the mickey out of me?" (p6)

"At the first school I used to get bullied there because I was different"(p1).

Interviewees attempted to cope with being bullied and the feeling of not being accepted in different ways, e.g. one participant described believing that people bullied him because they were jealous that he did not wear school uniform and another described how he bullied others because he believed this would gain him acceptance from his peer group.

> **"I used to pick on other kids that I didn't like... possibly to say to my friends that I'm not scared and that. I saw other people doing it and I thought if I do it, they might like me" (p2).**

> **" I got a few of my mates and went down to the first school and the people that were bullying me .... we bullied them" (p1).**

None of the interviewees reported receiving any kind of external support with bullying e.g. from teachers, parents or carers. Interviewees also described feeling 'different' within their family.

> **" ..... my mum and dad were always working....especially when deliveries had to be done, which left my mum, my dad, and my sister all working"(p9).**

> **"My brother was always the favourite and I always felt like the outcast" (p10).**

Interviewees also described many other negative consequences of having a learning disability. Some described feeling angry and frustrated at their perception of their own failure to be able to do things.

> **"He [brother] is the brainiest. I wanted to be the brainiest as well .... I have a habit of giving up too easy. I still have it even now. Sometimes I do and sometimes I don't. It depends on how I feel. It's like when I want to play a chord. Sometimes I get so angry because I play it wrong and I want to play it better than this. I've got so much things on my mind"(p1).**

> **"Well, you know, sometimes you might say the wrong thing. Because you've got to think before you say it. Because that's the way I do it. I've got so much on my mind, like, so many solutions, that it's just trying to find the right way of saying it. It's the way of trying to find the right words" [I:so sometimes its hard to find the right words?] "yes" (p1).**

"[I: why did you 'bunk'?] I found it difficult and I couldn't understand what he [teacher] was saying. Couldn't study so I gave up on it ....[in describing the worst aspects of school, this subject said] not understanding half the lessons, having a report card to sign in and sign out, a special unit for people who are a bit slow in the head" (p10).

"Well I hated school really... well, the work it was hard.... [I found it] ... harder than most [other students]" (p8).

These extracts from interviews show that interviewees' awareness of their learning disabilities led to further negative feelings and exclusion or isolation. As well as having a learning disability, some participants described additional disabilities which made them feel further isolated and excluded.

"I went to a special school because of hearing problems. I was stressed, I couldn't hear what the teacher was saying, so I tried to climb out the window half the time. I was in a world of my own" (p4).

"I was in a wheelchair so I couldn't go upstairs and I had to have one to one tuition in the headmistresses office. I wasn't learning like everyone else" (p6).

Where individuals were placed in 'special' classes to accommodate their difficulties with learning, they experienced this as further exclusion or felt infantalised.

"It was babyish, what babies do, not 13 year old teenagers. I wanted to do GCSE's and things like that, not play with toys" (p6).

In addition (as illustrated in the above examples) at times interviewees found school so unbearably difficult that they truanted. Some interviewees suggested that they thought their learning disability was something that they could eventually 'get over' if they tried hard enough and that finding the work difficult meant that they were 'bad' or not trying hard enough.

"I want to go to college to get my learning disability right" (p5).

"She [sister] can work in a bank, but I haven't got to that stage yet " (p7).

"I don't mind, I like saving lives, its good. That's what I'd like to be [paramedic], but it's going to be college for a lot of years" (p3).

"I couldn't keep up with the work and I was bad" [I: you were bad?] "Well, I wasn't good at doing my work...... I wasn't all that brainy" (p1).

1.v.   Early Behaviour Problems

Many of the interviewees described engaging in behaviours which often led to further disadvantage, such as relatives rejecting the individual or being expelled. One subject described himself as 'hyperactive' or 'giddy' and described destructive behaviours such as 'smashing things up'.

> "I wasn't that good. sometimes my mum wanted to see the last of me because I would get into too much trouble and she got fed up with me everyday, bringing the police back to the house and giving the family a bad name, with people looking" (p1).

In addition interviewees engaged in theft, either from shops or relatives with one subject describing himself as a 'compulsive spender'.

> "I done naughty things not related to fire setting. I was stealing mum's giro.... I just wanted money to spend, I was a compulsive spender" (p6).

Results from the file check list (reported above) also show that early behaviour problems, such as theft, bullying and truanting are common amongst this group.

Some interviewees felt that additional disabilities, including head injury and hearing impediments, had a marked negative impact on their early behaviour both at home and at school. Disruptive childhood behaviour eventually led to further disadvantage such as difficulties in interpersonal relationships and being received into care.

> "Before the accident, I think I was okay, but after the accident,I became like my own person. I feel that after the accident I became more violent towards my mum and family. I don't know why I used to get really angry with her" (p6).

1.vi. Parents As Good Figures

Most interviewees were able to describe some positive memories of their parents. Some participants described their parents as fun.

> "He's a good person, a good laugh. He likes to talk about football and he likes to go on holiday with my mum. Best father in the world" (p5).

> "My dad was 'wicked'. He'd take us to football, to the fair, shopping, he took us to the market and played with us" (p10).

Some described experiences of parents as comforters or problem solvers.

> "Sometimes [mother] she comforts me in her arms" (p1)

> "She'd sit down and talk to me, she would talk to me about my problems" (p9).

For some interviewees positive experiences of parents involved being given material goods or money. Other actions described by interviewees as caring might in fact be viewed as neglectful or irresponsible, such as allowing children to smoke or keeping secret the knowledge that their child was setting fires.

> "He would give out all his cigarettes" (p10)

> "She was an angel ..... because for one, my mum knew about what I was doing [setting fires] and she never shopped me ...... she didn't want to have me put away .... she wanted me to be with her"(p9).

2.   Antecedents of firesetting

While interviewees described their early lives as full of negative experiences, their firesetting in many instances was also preceded by negative events. These were frequently interpersonal in nature and typically involved more powerful others such as parents or institutions. Many of these

interpersonal experiences seemed to 'mirror' experiences in childhood (e.g. feeling excluded or rejected) and were associated with a sense of injustice and angry feelings.

2.i.   Arguments

Many of the interviewees reported that they had arguments directly before setting fires. Arguments that individuals described were mostly with powerful others such as parents, rather than equal peers, and individuals were generally left with feelings of anger towards that person.

> "I had an argument with V and T started getting involved and V told T to shut up and I told V to shut up and I thought 'right that's it' .... then I walked over to the flat and poured petrol all over V's bedroom and set it alight" (p6).

> "When I had an argument, I would normally do a runner then I just set the fires" (p2)

> "I was upset, I'd just had an argument with my mum"(p8).

2.ii.   Feeling Rejected or Unheard

Many interviewees described experiences of rejection before setting fires, including not being able to live with close family members when other siblings were able to or feeling unfavoured compared to siblings. One participant described feeling rejected when social services deemed her unable to care for her children.

> "I couldn't move back home straight away because my brother had just come out of prison .... they don't have any other rooms to put [my] bed in" (p3);

> "I had to go   back to boarding school in .... and my home is in ..... The first two days, I ripped up the train ticket but they still said I had to go. The Thursday before I had to go I went round to V's house and ... I set fire to the house" (p6).

In addition, interviewees described frequently not having their opinions and feelings heard, not being taken seriously or believed by others. Interviewees described how they felt that they had tried to communicate their difficulties to others and that others should have listened. Committing a

crime was described by some participants as a way to get organisations such as social services and the police to listen.

> "I told my sister but because of her funny attitude to me, if I try to discuss my problems with her, she jumps down my throat or she tells me that I shouldn't be telling her this" (p10)

> "I was definitely not being listened to. Noone believed me they thought it was self inflicted at first." (p4).

2.iii.   Boredom and loneliness

Some interviewees described experiences of loneliness and boredom before setting fires. Loneliness was related to having no friendship networks locally. In addition these participants felt they had little occupation with which to fill their day.

> "I had nothing to do, no friends, no job, and Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday were so boring that I really felt lonely and I was just a loner .... doing nothing really apart from travelling" (p6).

2.iv.   Psychosis

Some interviewees claimed to have set fires because of experiences of psychosis. Hallucinations at times were fire related, such as hearing voices that commanded the individual to 'set fires' or 'burn yourself' as well as seeing or feeling fire. However, mostly hallucinations were not fire related, such as hearing criticism and voice 'commentary'. This left interviewees feeling blamed, victimised, and confused. In addition the hallucinations resulted in fear about who in the individual's social network could be trusted, which in turn led to feelings of fear and isolation. Under these circumstances fire may be a way of trying to escape the hallucinations or to make the hallucinations 'go away' e.g. by throwing a lighter at a visual hallucination or by burning the side of the head to remove the voices. Therefore although fire stimuli might form a small part of an individual's hallucinations, other factors may lead the individual to setting fires.

> "I was hearing the voices to burn my hands and I just wanted the voices to stop so I did it. If I'm hallucinating things that are not real, then I pick up the lighter and I throw it. Just to get rid of that person that I'm seeing that it not really real, its just

in my head. If it's suicidal then I will pick up the lighter and want to burn the side of my brain, to stop me from thinking about the voices" (p10).

3. Personal Circumstances

This category includes negative personal circumstances which were present around the time that individuals set fires. Although these negative circumstances did not seem to be direct antecedents of firesetting, they reflect part of the negative context srrounding individuals when they set fires.

3.i. Lack of Supportive Relationships

Interviewees described marked difficulties in making friends and finding supportive relationships. Many described adult relationships that involved 'bad crowds'. One interviewee seemed confused how to avoid these relationships and had engaged in very ambiguous relationships with people he viewed as having a negative influence on him.

> "The other ones I don't even bother with no more. I don't talk to them. I'd probably still say hello to them, but I don't get involved. I don't hang around with them no more. Maybe I'd go for a drink with them, but I don't get involved with no trouble" (p1).

(It is also possible that this participant *would* have continued to be involved with these friends but felt he should reassure the interviewer and services that he would not). Some individuals described finding it difficult to know who to trust. "

> You don't know who you are dealing with. That's the reason that half the time, I never made friends with nobody" (p1).

Trusting others was also a difficulty in romantic relationships where participants described having been physically, sexually and/or emotionally abused by their partners.

> "He just used me for a visa for this country" (p7)

> "Some raped me, kicked me, some went off with [sister]" (p10).

One interviewee said that she was relieved at being in a secure unit where she was prevented from making new relationships with men which she felt would be abusive. As well as difficulties with trusting others and trusting themselves to choose appropriate people to be in relationships with, interviewees described their difficulties making friends and talking to people outside the secure unit.

[I: What made it hard [to make friends]?] "Hard to talk to people" (p6).

Despite these difficulties some interviewees described having many friends that they had made in institutions such as secure units.

"I'm happy with the friends that I've got. Loads of them. The whole ward of them at the moment" (p8)

"I met X in prison, we're best friends ...... and me and Y got on great in here and we're going to keep in contact" (p5).

However, it is highly questionnable to what extent these can provide the kind of supportive relationships that may help in reducing the risk of re-offending. Other interviewees felt people in the secure unit were better described as acquaintances than friends, suggesting that they felt they had no strong supportive relationships.

"Not real friends, if you can call people in here friends I suppose I have friends" (p6).

"Well I wouldn't actually say they were friends, I'd call them acquaintances"(p9).

The romantic relationships described by interviewees were often with partners who also had also had a negative personal history or mental health difficulties. Some participants felt that they could help their partners with their own emotionally traumatic past.

"Sit and talk and if she's got problems maybe I can help her because maybe I've been through the same kind of system and maybe I've been down, like, that road before" (p1).

3.ii.   Drug and Alcohol Misuse

Some interviewees described difficulties with drug and alcohol misuse. Although individuals were using drug and alcohol around the time of setting the fires, no participant admitted to being intoxicated whilst setting fires. For the interviewees in this study therefore, drugs and alcohol did not appear to act as a disinhibitor for the fire setting itself. However, substance misuse may form part of an overall pattern of addiction and an attempt to escape from negative emotions. In addition, for some individuals substance misuse led to further disadvantage such as homelessness and mental health difficulties.

> " It was the drink as well and I was glue sniffing. According to the doctors they said it was the glue sniffing which caused me to hear voices." (p3).

> "I lost contact with my mum and dad, then I started sniffing glue and gas. By the time they got back in contact I was out of my head with glue, it made me ill. When I was 18, I got paid £000's compensation [for having been abused]. I spent that on sniffing glue and hotels. I had my own flat, but I sold everything for alcohol, so I used to stay round a friend's house" (p5).

4.   Beliefs About Setting Fires

4.i.   Naivety about fire

Many of the interviewees seemed to lack an awareness of the dangers of setting fires. In particular they seemed naive regarding the injury, death and damage that fire can cause. They also appeared naive regarding the properties of fire (e.g. that it spreads, the immense heat that is generated, the size of flames, the dangers of smoke). Interviewees appeared to believe that some fires are safe to set if they tried to minimise harm, e.g. setting fire to a curtain and thinking that only the curtain would burn or attempting to set a 'small' fire. Interviewees also showed naivety regarding what it feels like to be around a fire and some interviewees described how they had wished to commit suicide in a fire which they had thought would be a quick painless death. When confronted with

the reality of fires, individuals often tried to minimise the damage, e.g. trying to stamp the fire out or trying to get away from the fire when the interviewee had intended to die in the fire.

> "Well, one way, I didn't actually think it would get out of control. The mat set fire to the curtain and I thought the curtain would drop and the fire would go out. But it went a different way and it went into the loft. It spread. Well one time it did get me a little bit worried and I tried to stamp it out" (p9).

> "When they showed me some photos of the damage and that, I couldn't believe it. [What did you feel when you saw photos of the damage?] Surprised" (p8).

4.ii.   Getting away with it

Some interviewees believed that they could get away with setting fires without detection or even had got away with it in the past and therefore had little reason to expect that they would be discovered.

> " I thought I could get away with it. Because I'd got away with it in the past" (p9).

> "I didn't want to get caught. I was in Youth Offender Institution and was really down in the dumps wishing I had taken the back route away. I wouldn't have been caught if I had gone that way" (p6)

> " I used to get away with it sometimes" (p4).

This gives a sense of firesetting as a crime which perpetrators may think they can carry out without repercussions. Fire setting could also be seen as a private, secretive crime. Only one of the interviewees claimed to set fires when he was with other individuals.

5.   Planning

Nearly half of those interviewed described having planned fires they set. This suggests that fire setting is not necessarily an impulsive act but is often carried out in a pre-meditated way. Planning included checking to make sure that noone was around or inside the target building so as to minimise harm to others and prevent being caught. A sense of naivety is also reflected within this category e.g. as individuals believed that they could minimise harm or prevent detection.

"I planned it first before I done it. Just to see that there is noone inside. Because I don't like go and set it straight away because there might be someone inside. There might be kids, like, you know, playing hide and seek and I wasn't realising. It took me 2 times. It took me 2 or 3 times to get it right. I went back the first time and I think, this time it might not work. So I had to try a 3rd time, when I sussed it" (p1).

Interviewees also planned how to achieve the biggest fire possible. For some participants planning involved considerable attention to detail, including the use of maps or diagrams and repeated visits to the target site.

"I would sort of plan it, I would sit down and draw little pictures in my book" (p4).

"I was going out first. I was going and [unclear] a map. So there were 2 areas. See, know what I mean? To see what was the best place to start it. Like, shall I start it in the big room or the small room" (p1).

Planning may also involve planning the aftermath of a fire, e.g. planning what is to be said to the police if the individual is questioned, deciding from which location to watch the fire or buying petrol and matches in different shops so as not to arouse suspicion.

"I walked by the back way to my house, because I had my own flat. I looked in the TV times so if they came and asked me I'd say 'no, I've been watching this and if they asked me what had been going on, I 'd already read about it so I could tell them. I used to get away with it sometimes but not always" (p4)

"I ... walked around town to the other side to a garage and got the petrol, but I didn't get the matches in the garage otherwise they would know"(p6).

Despite planning a fire in some detail, some interviewees seemed to change their plans very quickly in response to external circumstances. For example, if other people were present, individuals might abandon their plan to watch their fire. Alternatively, whilst going to set fire to one target, they might decide that another target was preferable, which might be partly to do with opportunity.

"I actually look to see if anyone's around and if there is people around then I won't do it. I will go someone else where people are not around"(p2)

"Well, to start with I was going to set fire to the ditch and set the ditch alight. But then I saw this front door and threw the petrol and then threw a cigarette and up it went" (p9).

6. Motivations and Maintaining Factors for Firesetting

6.i. Excitement and Pleasure

Interviewees often described watching fires that they had set as exciting. The word 'excitement' used by many of the interviewees in talking about setting fires suggests an increased level of arousal or tension and the stirring up of feelings. Participants described the excitement they had experienced when watching the fire engines arrive and watching firemen use their equipment in attempting to extinguish fires that the individual had set.

I know it's very dangerous, but I got a kick out of it as well'. [What did it feel like to see the fire that you'd set?] "Great. I'd get a kick out of it it was all right!" (p4)

"Well I think when I started doing it, I used to get excited because I used to like the fire engine and seeing the fire engine coming out". (p2)

[You said you got a kick out of it, what did you mean?] "Well, it's fun isn't it, watching the fire brigade". [Did other fires give you that feeling or just the fires you set?] "No, just the ones that I set. When I done fire, I didn't stand there, but I used to set fires and then I was hiding so that I could see". (p4)

Thus, feelings of excitement were elicited mainly by the individual's own fires and were not experienced around fires in general. This suggests that the individual is not aroused to fire stimuli per se but it is more what it means to actually set a fire oneself. However, scores on the Fire Interest Rating Scale suggest that firesetters *do* experience increased arousal to fire and fire related stimuli per se. this point is considered further in the discussion.

The size of the fire seemed important, with levels of arousal apparently rising in proportion with the size of the fire set.

"You feel differently each time. You do a grass fire you get a feeling and when you do a car fire you get a different feeling. Normally, you get cold shivers for the car and you get extra shivers when you set fire to a house". [I: So as the fires get bigger, the feelings get bigger?] "yes, it starts small and it starts climbing" (p9).

Interviewees also described fires as warming or comforting and gave the sense that fires could elicit a feeling of being free from hardship or pain or trouble. It seems that being around fire in general can elicit a feeling of physical or emotional well-being. However, for the general population *contained* fires are associated with warmth and comfort (e.g. log fires). It is possible that that individuals' naivety (see above) results in a blurring between the comfort of small fires and the danger of large fires.

6.ii.   Release from tension/relaxation:

Interviewees described how setting fires could lead to feelings of relaxation or a release of emotional tension.

"Sometimes they [people who set fires] feel good. Sometimes it feels relaxing" (p9).

"I just liked setting fires, because I liked the feeling. I liked the feeling because it made me happy. So I feel more happier than when I set it. Well, it felt good, in a way, it felt good". [I: What happened after you set the fire?] "I felt a lot better".(p1)

[I: So you have said that you felt really angry and that is why you wanted to set the fire. How did you feel once you had actually set the fire?] "Relieved" (p7).

In particular, interviewees talked about being able to release anger by setting fires. Individuals described a sense that fire could take their anger out of them and feeling that their anger was actually in the fire. This suggests a projection of negative feelings onto the fire.

"It was good because all my anger was in the fire and when the fire exploded, my anger exploded with it" (p1).

Fire setting was also viewed by some interviewees as a method of releasing anger safely without hurting others. If individuals released their anger by more confrontative methods some interviewees described feeling worried that they would hurt others and get hurt in turn.

> "I was feeling a bit pissed off, angry with my dad. Well, it felt better I was getting my anger out with something else without doing something to my dad. If I hadn't have set the fires, I'd have hit him and I would have got even more hurt from him. So, instead of taking it out on someone else the fire took it out for me" (p2)

As well as releasing anger interviewees described how setting fires offered a way of feeling avenged, a way of exacting retribution for some injustice that the individual felt had happened to themselves or others.

> "Maybe if he did something against friends of mine and that is the way of getting him back" (p1).

Some interviewees viewed fire as an appropriate punishment for perceived injustices.

> "My mum made my life a misery, so I am going to make her life a misery" (P6 - describing thoughts before setting a fire);

> "I could have killed them, that was my intention. That's what they did to ...... so I tried to do it to them" (p4).

Three interviewees described high levels of distress prior to setting fires and described the incident as a suicide attempt, at least partly to escape from emotions or experiences that they felt to be intolerable.

> "To kill myself I suppose. Because at that time I was really unhappy being away from home, but now I am used to it" (p6)

Some interviewees described fire as a pleasure to behold. It was described as beautiful, having many colours and movement. The descriptions of some intereviewees of concentrating deeply while staring into fire suggests that, at least for some staring at fire could be meditative and

relaxing, a possible escape route from the wide range of negative circumstances in interviewees' lives.

> "Stuff like staring into it..... it's something to concentrate on and it's something that, you know amuses you because it's different colours and you can daze straight into it" (p10).

> "I just like looking at flames and that, the colours in the fire sometimes it changes. Sometimes you've got like yellow, blue and orange and sometimes you see them all mixed together" (p1).

6.iii. Gaining Power

Interviewees described how setting a fire could lead to an experience of feeling powerful. Setting fires may be experienced by individuals as the only accessible way to gain a sense of power, or authority. Interviewees described firesetting as making them feel good and powerful, not least by being able to set fires alone. In addition, the unpredictable nature of fires that they set seemed to make the interviewees feel more powerful.

> "It's really powerful and everybody wants to have power and everyone wants the upper hand, so the quickest way is fire". [I: Did it make you feel more powerful?] " yes". (p10)

> "I think that it made me feel good that I could do something on my own and you know it might not or it might get out of control. It's like a bit of power". [I: Do you feel like you had power?] "No, I don't think so. But when I started doing the fires, I knew that I could get power then" (p2).

The excitement and power of setting fires may be further aroused by the danger involved, the risky nature of setting fires.

> "Bonfires are not that exciting but when it's a real big fire and it's out of control, that's what I like. You see everything catch alight and burn and everything." (p2)

> "I don't think anyone realised I could be so dangerous"(S6),

> "I think some people enjoy seeing the fire fighters and how dangerous it can be (p3).

> "Don't get me wrong, I know it's dangerous, but to me, I got a kick out of it as well" (p4),

"Something might happen it might get out of control or out of hand" (p1).

It seems therefore that although individuals at times seemed to have a naiveity (e.g. to danger to life) regarding firesetting (see above), they also had a sense that fires could get out of control and this added to the appeal of firesetting. Fire may also be chosen as it can cause permanent damage and much destruction. In this way fire can express something an individual is wanting to express in a very powerful manner.

> **"If you hurt someone you hurt them for good and stuff like that. The more aggressive you get the more you want to hurt people, even though they got nothing to do with it. But you've stated your point and you've hurt innocent people who hurt you when you were innocent" (p10)**

6.iv.   Wish to Belong and Be Important

Interviewees described experiences of firesetting which suggest that a sense of belonging or inclusion and a sense of social desirability is experienced in the aftermath of setting a fire.

> **"Well I always wanted to be a fireman right from the age of ten. But I didn't understand, so I was actually doing the fires and the fire brigade came out and then I helped to put it out....... I felt like one of the fire brigade, part of the group" (p9).**

> **"They used to let us use the hosepipes to put the fires out. A 'flapper' I used. What they do if someone sets a fire to a field and the fire engines can't get to it, the fire fighters use a flapper to damp it down" (p3).**

Fire-fighters represent strong heroic characters in our society. They arrive to rescue and help others, often saving lives. They receive a great deal of respect and praise from members of the public and are viewed as a strong and positive example of masculinity. This is in stark contrast to the experiences interviewees had experienced in most areas of their life. By being part of the fire brigade or helping them, interviewees perceived themselves as having access to at least a part of this high esteem.

Some interviewees described how caring for others was what they most valued about themselves

[I: What do you like most about yourself?] "I'm a sucker for a sad story" (p5).

Listening to others' difficulties made individuals feel more needed, like they belonged. That some interviewees longed for this sense of esteem is illustrated by one subject describing what he said was the best experience he had ever had

> "I was walking along and a woman stopped me. She was about 95 and she said that she'd just let her dog off the lead and the dog went into the water and swam from one end to the other end and I jumped in and I swam all the way out to get the dog ... and I saved him. Then I was in the paper I was on the news. I felt good about myself for doing that ..., I like saving people's lives, it's good. That is what I'd like to be. But it's gonna be college for a lot of years" (p3).

> "I want a dog. A Jack Russell called Bonsai. Ankle Biter. I won't fuck up this time because I'd lose Bonsai. I'd have to give Bonsai away and not only would that break my heart but it would break Bonsai's heart as well. I want to work with animals, voluntary" (p5).

6.v. Getting Help

For many of the interviewees, setting fires was a way of obtaining help with an emotional or practical difficulty. Often setting fires and getting arrested, rather than resulting in a negative outcome, was viewed as a solution to the problems that the individual felt unable to cope with. Problems included the fear of being attacked by another individual; dealing with past abuse; feeling unable to escape emotional or physical abuse; not feeling that anyone is listening; feeling powerless to change an unwanted place of residence (e.g. institution); and wanting more medication. Individuals felt that they had tried to get help in other ways but were not believed or they felt that nothing had changed. As a result, some individuals lost trust in other people to help them.

> "Well, I think I did it for attention............ ringing the fire brigade for attention ...... I wanted some help"(p8).

> "I think the reason I wanted the fire brigade was because I wanted help" (p2).

> "I wanted someone to listen to my problems and really help me, you know instead of just turning me away ... I had to commit a crime to get the help" (p4).

"They need help, a cry for help. If they want help with their problems to help sort it all out or with abuse and things like that .... if they don't get the help they ask for then they set a fire, then they get arrested, then someone listens to their problems what they got" (p3).

The fire setting did result in the, at least partial resolving of problems for some individuals and a sense that in secure units people had listened to their difficulties.

"It was good in the way that I got arrested.." (p5)

"Now I've been here, I have got that help I required where they listened to me. I never had that before..." (p4).

<u>DISCUSSION</u>

In the discussion that follows, I discuss the results of the quantitative and qualitative aspects of this study and consider how these relate together. The focus will be on factors that appear to be important in the development of firesetting by individuals who have learning disabilities and to what extent these differ from firesetting amongst the general population. In light of these, I consider implications for clinical work with this population and areas for future research.

Locus of Control

The hypothesis that arson offenders who have learning disabilities would have a more external Locus of Control than either other offenders or non offenders, is supported in this study. It has been reported that individuals who have a learning disability tend to have a more external locus of control anyway (Wehmeyer and Palmer, 1997). Therefore, it could have been hypothesised that high locus of control scores in arson offenders could be simply due to the fact that many arson offenders have learning disabilities. However, when compared to other offenders and controls with learning disabilities in this study, arson offenders were found to have a significantly greater external locus of control. Arson offenders' external locus of control reported in previous studies cannot therefore be explained purely as a result of learning disability. Instead the results indicate that people with learning disabilities who set fires are particularly likely to feel that their world is controlled by factors external to them.

Fire Interest Rating Scale (Clare et al., 1992)

As predicted, arson offenders rated themselves as likely to experience greater excitement or happiness when watching fires and fire related paraphernalia (such as firemen) than either other offenders or controls. This excitement is discussed in more depth later in the discussion.

Assertiveness

It was expected, as found in previous studies (Jackson et al., 1987b; Rice and Harris, 1991) that arson offenders would rate themselves as being less assertive than other offenders or controls.

Difficulties in being assertive and an external locus of control are often found together, both for arson offenders (Jackson et al., 1987b) and in the general learning disability population (Gresham et al., 1997). However, this hypothesis was not supported in this study. There are several possible explanations for this result. The assertiveness measure used in this study asks individuals to rate how anxious they would *feel* being assertive in different situations and how likely it is that they would *act* assertively in these situations. It is possible that arson offenders *feel* that they are being assertive and *believe* they would not feel anxious acting in what they would consider assertive ways, however, due to deficits in the *execution* of their assertive behaviour they do not gain the response from others that they require. Indeed studies have reported that arson offenders show under-developed social skills and interpersonal deficits when compared to other offenders (Geller, 1992; Bradford, 1992; Hurley and Monahan, 1969). Learning disabled arson offenders are therefore possibly mistaken in thinking that they are effectively assertive. Heimberg and Harrison (1980) found that offenders were likely to score higher on assertiveness than non offenders. They concluded that the offenders were becoming confused between assertive and aggressive behaviour and were rating themselves as being able to carry out assertive behaviour when in actual fact they would do this in an aggressive manner. Indeed, Rice and Harris (1991) found behaviour that prisoners rated as assertive, prison officers rated as hostile and aggressive. It is possible that offenders with a learning disability might be particularly likely to make this error as they are reported to have increased difficulties in differentiating between emotions and methods of expressing grievances or negative emotions (Bates, 1992; Black et al, 1997). In addition, where arson offenders with learning disabilities *are* exhibiting assertive behaviour this often occurs in a context where they have little legitimate power and other individuals may rate assertive behaviour as aggressive and therefore positive outcomes are not attained from being assertive (Holt, 1994). A more effective measure of assertiveness for individuals with learning disabilities might ask them to rate specific components of anxiety (such as 'heart beating fast') and also use behavioural assessments by asking independent raters (who are not in a position of power in the individual's life) to rate individuals' *actual* attempts at assertive behaviour. Where individuals feel they are being assertive but their behaviour is perceived differently by others, they are unlikely to be able to

influence events. This in turn is likely to lead to beliefs that their world is controlled by powerful others, and the need to find other ways of expressing needs and grievances (Holt, 1994).

It is also possible that the non significant result on the assertiveness scale may be influenced by the fact that the 'other offenders' group was made up mostly of sexual offenders (especially child sexual offenders) who have been reported to have low assertiveness (Beckett, 1994). Previous studies had compared arson offenders with violent offenders who may represent a distinct group from other offenders in respect of assertiveness.

In addition, compared with the Locus of Control Scale (Norwicki-Strickland, 1976) the Assertiveness Schedule (Gambrill and Richey, 1975) seems particularly open to social desirability bias. For example, 'owning a lucky charm' (one of the items indicating external locus of control) could be equally as socially desirable as reporting not owning a lucky charm. However, reporting feeling 'very worried about taking broken things back to a shop' (an item indicating low assertiveness) may be seen as admitting to some kind of weakness or inability. This social desirability effect is particularly likely to affect individuals who have a learning disability who wish to appear socially attractive, please the interviewer and gain the 'correct' answers on questionnaires (Flynn, 1986; Clare and Gudjonsson, 1993; Evans, 1991). In addition, other authors suggest that people with learning disabilities protect themselves from negative *self* evaluations by not rating themselves negatively on questionnaires (Edgerton, 1967; Guthrie, Butler and Garlow, 1964; Guthrie, Butler, Garlow and White, 1964). However, although there may be limitations with the assertiveness measure used in this study, suitable alternative questionnaires for individuals with learning disabilities have yet to be developed. This questionnaire was chosen as it is a respected assertiveness questionnaire in the general population, it included many situations relevant to people with learning disabilities and the items could be presented in a way that would be easy for individuals who had a learning disability to understand.

State Trait Anger Inventory (STAXI) (Speilberger, 1979)

Contrary to hypotheses, there were no significant differences on State Trait Anger Inventory sub-scales between arson offenders and other groups, although differences between mean scores were in the direction predicted. There may be several explanations for this. As noted previously the 'other offender' group was made up of a high percentage of child sexual offenders who might also have very significant difficulties with anger and be likely to try to suppress angry feelings (Clark and Erooga, 1994). In addition, within the learning disability population as a whole there may be difficulties in assertively dealing with anger (Black and Novaco, 1993; Kiernan, 1991; Black et al, 1997). This might reflect their powerless social context (Clegg, 1993) or difficulty with emotional expression. It is also possible that as the questionnaire does not really measure *intensity* of anger over time, and although all groups might experience anger and try to cope with it in similar ways, the offenders may experience a more prolonged *intense* level of anger.

As with the assertiveness questionnaire, the STAXI was not validated or standardised for people who have learning disabilities and was used as a suitable alternative for this population has yet to be developed. Many of the questions on the STAXI are quite transparent and may be particularly vulnerable to social desirability bias which (as noted above) is common amongst this population. This effect could be exacerbated within forensic a population who may feel it is not in their interest to admit that various situations make them feel angry.

Social Comparison Scale (Szivos-Bach, 1993)

There were no significant differences on the subscales of the social comparison scale (power, virtue/value, competence) between the groups in this study. However there were significant differences for self concept compared to a sibling, where arson offenders felt less favourable about themselves compared to siblings than non offenders. This supports Day (1993) who reported that arson offenders show particularly negative self evaluations. In addition, arson offenders felt less favourable about themselves compared to friends than did non offenders and this was approaching significance. This low self evaluation compared to others suggests that arson offenders feel

particularly inferior to others and is likely to impact profoundly on how they act in interpersonal situations. Beliefs about the self as inferior are highly likely to prevent assertive behaviour with others who are viewed as more powerful. In particular, individuals may fear negative evaluation from others as this would reinforce their ideas about themselves as inferior and lead to shame, an intensely painful emotion (Friend and Gilbert, 1973; Watson and Friend, 1969; Gilbert, 1994; Gilbert, 1998). It has been suggested that fear of negative evaluation is common amongst arson offenders generally (Jackson et al., 1987) and it could be hypothesised that shame is an important emotion for this group. Shamed individuals experience helplessness, passivity, inhibition, and paralysis in situations which involve confrontation and may be left with feelings of 'brooding resentment', engaging in unassertive or passive-aggressive ways of dealing with the conflict (Gilbert, 1998; Lewis, 1986). Such feelings of inferiority and shame may also underlie the significant external locus of control found amongst arson offenders who have learning disabilities, in the form of beliefs that they are too weak or inferior to control their own life.

File Check List

Abuse

The file analysis reveals that, as reported in previous studies (Jackson et al., 1987a; Bradford, 1982; Hill et al., 1992), both arson offenders and other offenders in this study were likely to have suffered significantly increased rates of psychosocial disadvantage in their earlier lives. All offenders in this study had suffered some kind of abuse. A high percentage of all types of abuse were suffered by both arson offenders and other offenders including physical abuse (81.8% and 100% respectively), sexual abuse (69.2% and 61.5% respectively) and neglect (53.8% and 30.8% respectively). Although this supports the earlier finding by Stewart and Culver (1982) and Puri et al. (1995) who found high rates of physical or sexual abuse amongst arson offenders (11-44%), the rates of abuse found in this study are particularly high. This might reflect the higher incidence of abuse reported to be experienced by individuals who have a learning disability generally. Although none of the non offenders in this study reported that they had suffered sexual abuse or neglect, and none of the seven files examined reported that these individuals had suffered abuse, the researcher did not have access to eight of the non offenders' files and self reporting of a

sensitive subject such as abuse might be expected to be low. There are no reliable national statistics available on the prevalence of abuse of children who have a learning disability, however sexual abuse rates within the learning disability population as a whole are thought to be high. Using varying definitions of abuse and varying methodologies, studies have estimated the prevalence of sexual abuse within this population to be between 0.25% (Brown and Turk, 1992) and as high as 58% (Hard and Plumb, 1987, unpublished study reported in McCarthy and Thompson, 1996). It is believed that the rates of abuse in this population are particularly high because of environmental factors (e.g. institutional care and tolerance of some types of abuse by others) and interpersonal factors (e.g. poor communication skills, low assertiveness, and social isolation of learning disabled people) (McCarthy and Thompson, 1996; Craft, 1994; Harris and Craft, 1994). These high rates of abuse place individuals with learning disabilities at particular risk of mental health and behavioural difficulties (Moss, 1999). There were no significant differences found between arson offenders and other offenders in prevalence of abuse suffered by the two groups, a finding which supports previous studies (Hill et al., 1992; Bradford, 1982). This therefore indicate that abuse may be an important factor for the development of offending behaviours generally amongst people with learning disabilities, but insufficient to explain why such individuals specifically set fires. However, it is also notable that a high proportion of the 'other offender' group were child sexual offenders and these individuals are particularly likely to have experienced childhood sexual abuse (Abel et al., 1984; Briggs et al., 1998).

Loss

Both offender groups experienced greater significant early childhood losses than non offenders. However, although there were significant differences between the offending and non offending groups with regard to spending significant periods in care, there were no significant differences between arson offenders and other offenders on this variable. The percentage of offending individuals who spent time in care is very high (over half). Traditionally individuals with learning disabilities who showed disruptive behaviour in early childhood or young adulthood, were particularly likely to be admitted to an institution e.g. one of the large learning disability hospitals. For many individuals who stayed in these institutions, they were damaging to mental health and

amongst these hospitals all kinds of abuse were not uncommon, from both other residents and staff (Barron, 1989; McCarthy and Thompson, 1997) with some estimates of victims of sexual abuse being as high as 85% of those in institutional care (Moss, 1999). There were no significant differences between the groups in this study with regard to death of a close relative.

Parental Mental Illness

The results show a significant difference between the offenders and the non offenders on significant mental illness in parents. This supports the finding of Stewart and Culver (1982) who found a very high percentage of mental illness in parents of young arson offenders. Although not all mental illness in parents causes detrimental affects on children, it can mean that parents are unable to attend to their child's emotional or even physical needs, or that parents act in bizarre or abusive ways and that children are more likely to be placed in care (Department of Health, 2000; Neff, 1994; Prochnow and DeFronzo, 1997; Rutter, 1987). However, in this study no significant differences were found between arson offenders and other offenders on this factor, suggesting that this may be an important variable to consider as a precursor, to antisocial behaviour generally, but not specifically to fire setting. It is also possible, that low the rates of mental illness amongst the parents of non offenders in this study reflect the fact that many of these participants were questioned about this directly and may have been unaware of, or unwilling to reveal their parents' mental health problems.

Drug and Alcohol Misuse

Offenders in this study were found to have significantly greater rates of drug and alcohol abuse than non offenders. Although, as noted in the introduction, Hill et al. (1982) found that arson offenders were less likely to use substances than violent offenders, there were found to be no significant differences between the arson offenders and the other offenders on substance misuse in this study. In addition, the rates of substance misuse by the offenders in this study was generally much lower than that found by Hill et al. This finding may reflect a general lack of 'opportunity' to use drugs and alcohol given that learning disabled individuals are more likely to live in institutions or with families where access to substances may be limited, or may have limited

finances (Christian and Poling, 1997). Where substances are abused by offenders they may be used to alleviate painful feelings. In particular, Wenc (1980) notes that, intoxication may serve as a great "intellectual equaliser" and may therefore be used to cope with the social rejection and stigmatisation experienced by individuals who have a learning disability. However, substance misuse may also serve as a 'disinhibitor' for offending behaviours, allowing the individual overcome internal inhibitions, such as cognitions, which would otherwise stop offending behaviour from taking place (Finkelhor et al., 1986; Briggs et al., 1998).

Additional Disabilities

Contrary to results reported by several researchers (Lewis and Yarnell, 1951; Clare et al., 1992; Rice and Harris, 1991) there were no significant differences between the three groups on additional disabilities, which included speech impediments and physical disabilities. The significant differences reported by previous studies may reflect the fact that no studies had specifically compared groups of offenders who had learning disabilities. A high proportion of arson offenders (who are charged with their offence) have learning disabilities (Lewis and Yarnell, 1951; Yesevage et al., 1983; Walker and McCabe, 1973) and it is therefore likely that various additional impairments that are sometimes associated with a learning disability, such as speech impediments or facial disfigurements, are found to be high in arson offending groups. However, such impediments do not appear to distinguish between arson offenders and other offenders who have learning disabilities.

Truanting and Suspensions from school

It is perhaps unsurprising that both groups of offenders have a significantly higher rate of truanting and suspensions from school than non offenders. Various researchers have found that truancy is significantly linked to antisocial behaviour (Farrington, 1995; Graham and Bowling, 1995; Robins and Robertson, 1996) and it has been suggested that truancy may contribute to the risk of a 'drift' into crime, e.g. by providing time and opportunities when unsupervised (Rutter et al., 1998). Individuals who have mild learning disabilities may be particularly likely to truant from school. In a longitudinal study, Maughn et al. (1996) found school children with reading difficulties were

much more likely to truant and risks for antisocial behaviour in adolescence rose in line with the truancy. Similarly, measures of IQ and ability in children of pre-school age were found to be linked with increased risk of truanting and disruptive or antisocial behaviour (Howlin and Rutter, 1987; Richman et al, 1982; Stattin and Klackenberg-Larsson, 1993). However, although difficulties at school and truanting may be important in the development of general antisocial and offending behaviour, they do not appear to distinguish between arson and other offenders.

Mental Health Difficulties

No significant differences were found between arson offenders and other offenders on rates of mental health difficulties. This supports previous research (Jackson et al., 1987a; Rice and Harris, 1991; Rice and Harris, 1995; and Bradford et al., 1992) and suggests that mental health diagnoses are common amongst offenders generally, not just arson offenders. However, it is noteworthy that gender effects, or rates of specific types of mental health difficulty were not analysed in this study, due to the small sample sizes. In addition, while this study found a very high rate of mental health diagnoses amongst offenders, this is likely to be affected by the fact that participants were recruited from regional medium secure units which accommodate individuals who would be inappropriately placed in prison, due to mental health difficulties, learning disabilities or both.

Age of Offending

Some studies have found that arson offenders begin offending (by setting fires) at a much earlier age than other offenders (Jackson et al., 1987a). However, this was not found to be the case in this study. Arson offenders and other offenders were reported to have begun offending around the same age. In addition, arson offenders often were first prosecuted for offences other than arson e.g. theft or taking and driving away. This suggests that arson may develop out of general antisocial behaviour.

From the quantitative analysis then, it was found that all offenders with learning disabilities experience considerably increased rates of psychosocial disadvantage including abuse, significant losses, parental mental illness, alcohol problems, truancy and mental health difficulties compared to

non offenders. However, arson offenders additionally rate themselves as having significantly less personal control over their life and the world around them and significantly lower self esteem than non offenders. In addition, arson offenders rate themselves as feeling significantly more positive or excited around fire or fire related stimuli than either other offenders or non offenders.

Interview Analysis:

Psychosocial Disadvantage

During the qualitative analysis of interviews with arson offenders several themes emerged. Arson offenders described numerous traumatic experiences in childhood such as severe physical abuse, sexual abuse and experiences of being rejected or neglected. Being abused as a child can leave individuals feeling powerless, stigmatised, traumatised and betrayed and can disrupt both childhood and adult attachment relationships (Finkelhor, 1988; Briere, 1992; Jehu, 1992). Indeed, participants in this study described that as a consequence of these negative early experiences they experienced emotions of anger, guilt, powerlessness, hopelessness and suicidality. Jehu (1992) also found that self denigratory beliefs were very common amongst abuse survivors. In particular these beliefs were common in relation to themes of safety (*"Other people are dangerous"*); trust *("I cannot trust my own perceptions, others cannot be trusted to hurt me");* self esteem *("I am bad" "I am flawed")*; Control *("I am weak" "I am powerless");* and connection *("I am isolated from others" "It is dangerous for me to have close intimate relationships with other people")*. One interviewee described clearly the anger that he felt towards his father with regard to the abuse that he had suffered, but he believed he was *powerless* to do anything about it and was left fantasising about some way of avenging himself. Such a description seems to illustrate a 'brooding resentment' associated with feeling inferior and powerless in conflictual situations (Scheff, 1998). Beliefs such as "I am powerless" are also influenced by events surrounding the abuse, e.g. whether the child is believed when they attempt to tell others, whether they are protected from further abuse and whether they have supportive relationships (Briere, 1992; Jehu, 1992). Participants in this study described experiences of not being believed when they tried to tell people about the abuse or to gain prosecution against the offender. It has been shown that individuals who have a

learning disability are at a particular disadvantage with regard to being able to communicate experiences of abuse due to service or interpersonal factors (Craft, 1994; McCarthy and Thompson, 1997). They are also at a disadvantage when attempting to gain protective or legal action as a result of the abuse, with confusing legal processes and few allowances being made in court proceedings for witnesses with learning disabilities; (Birch, 2000; Cook, 2000; Hollingsworth, 2000). Where abuse was discovered by agencies, individuals in this study were often placed in care, either in an institution or with foster carers. However, as noted above, while intended as a protective measure for individuals in this study, this at times lead to further losses and abuse. These negative factors surrounding the abuse are likely to further reinforce feelings and beliefs of powerlessness, lack of control, lack of trust, lack of safety, low self-esteem and isolation.

In addition to the above feelings resulting from abuse, participants in this study also described feelings of exclusion and of being different to peers and relatives. Indeed as a group in society individuals with learning disabilities are disempowered, socially excluded and stigmatised. There are few positive role models with whom an individual with mild or borderline learning disabilities can identify and they are more often portrayed in the media with negative and degrading imagery (Lewis, 1998; Williams, 2001). The participants in this study described feeling excluded at school, falling behind with work, being placed in 'special classes' and having few social relationships. In addition, because participants in this study functioned at the upper end of the mild learning disabilities range or within the borderline learning disabilities range, they may not identify with others who have learning disabilities but feel excluded from the normal population. Not surprisingly, these experiences had a strong negative effect on the individuals' sense of themselves as incompetent, spoiled or 'no good' compared to others who do not have a learning disability (Lewis, 1998). This sense of self as deficient has been described as one of the 'wounds' of social devaluation (Williams, 2001) and the results of the social comparison scale suggest that this is significantly pronounced for the arson offenders in this study. A sense of exclusion and stigmatisation was reinforced for individuals in this study who were often picked on or bullied at school. This supports Jackson et al. (1987a) who found that arson offenders had a significant history of being bullied and socially isolated. Individuals who have learning disabilities are

particularly vulnerable to being bullied at school and in other areas of their lives (Haynie et al., 2001; Thurgood and Hames, 1999) and in the normal population such experiences have been linked to significant mental health difficulties (Rigby, 2000). Even where they were not bullied at school, individuals in this study had few supportive social networks at school. Although many participants in this study were unaware why this was so, it is known that children with learning disabilities are particularly vulnerable to being isolated and excluded from peer groups and consequently experience loneliness and social isolation (Gresham and MacMillan, 1997).

Individuals in this study described acting in antisocial ways such as stealing, truanting and violence throughout childhood and into young adulthood. These behaviours seem to have arisen, at least in part, out of the emotional disturbance associated with experiences of abuse and rejection. Indeed, antisocial behaviour in children has been found to be associated with emotional disturbance (Dishion et al., 1995). In addition, these behaviours may develop as an attempt to be accepted, albeit by a deviant group, e.g. bullying others in an attempt to gain status. However, such behaviours may also serve to perpetuate negative, punitive and sometimes abusive responses from parents and others such as teachers, thereby continuing a cycle of disadvantage through increased punishments and rejection (Dishion et al., 1995; Gresham and MacMillan, 1997). In addition, as noted above, activities such as truanting may lead to a drift into crime because whilst truanting individuals have more opportunities to offend and are often socialising with a deviant peer group, becoming further detached from the authority of school (Rutter et al., 1998).

Although individuals in this study also described some positive experiences of their parents it is likely that these were often not sufficient to counter the negative effects of abusive experiences. In addition, parents or other close relatives who were abusive were also attachment figures and therefore at times likely to be a source of pleasure, comfort or protection. Where an attachment figure perpetrates abuse, this adds to the distress, self blame and confusion of those abused and leads to worse outcomes in adulthood (Finkelhor, 1985; Briere, 1992; Alexander et al., 1998). It is noteworthy that, some of the positive experiences of parents described by the arson offenders might be considered to be neglectful or 'antisocial' of parents e.g. encouraging young children to

smoke or letting a child 'get away with' fire setting behaviour. Indeed, 'undercontrol' by parents is considered by researchers to be a significant factor in the development of antisocial behaviour (Patterson, 1982; Larzelere et al., 1990).

As found in the file check list, arson offenders may use drugs or alcohol to help them cope with their distress and to block out painful emotions. However, drug and alcohol misuse also perpetuated distress for this group e.g. by causing poverty and even further mental health difficulties. The drug and alcohol use by the offenders in this study did not appear to serve as a disinhibitor for offences and was not used as a justification or 'excuse' for setting fires. Rather, drug and alcohol misuse seem to represent part of a more general pattern of disadvantage and attempts to cope with emotional distress.

Triggers to Firesetting

Beliefs such as "I am powerless" and the painful feelings associated with these are likely to be activated when confronted with a life event relevant to this belief (Beck, 1995; Fennell, 1999; Young and Behary, 1999). Antecedents to fire setting described by participants in this study may be particularly likely to activate these ideas, such as arguments and disagreements with others. In particular, disagreements preceding fire setting were often with powerful others such as parents and other individuals who did not have learning disabilities. As noted previously, for an individual who believes they are inferior and has little power or control, conflict may be especially challenging. Their beliefs about power and status may prevent effective assertive behaviour or the attitude of others towards them as a low status group may mean that their attempts at assertive behaviour have little effect (Sanderson, 1995). Painful beliefs of inferiority and feelings of anger were also activated in another antecedent to fire setting, which was feeling unheard and rejected by others. Individuals felt that their opinions or distress were not being taken seriously by services and/or by family members. Indeed, historically people with learning disabilities have been deemed incapable of making their own decisions (Sanderson, 1995) and often also have particular difficulties presenting their point in a manner which will be heard and taken seriously by others. In addition, individuals with mild or borderline learning disabilities suffering emotional distress or

mental health difficulties are sometimes at a particular disadvantage in seeking professional support as services may struggle to decide whether local learning disability or mental health services would best be meet their needs (Evers and Charles, 2000).

Feelings of boredom and loneliness were also experienced by interviewees before setting fires. People with mild and borderline learning disabilities may be particularly vulnerable to these experiences since many of the available day opportunities cater for people with more severe learning disabilities and would be unsuitable for the participants in this study. Opportunities to find paid or even voluntary employment are often limited as are opportunities for further education, and these may not be viable options because of economic considerations such as the effect on benefits (Mental Health Foundation, 1996; Werthneir, 1996). Unemployment often limits access to social networks, a sense of achievement and status and may perpetuate the feelings of exclusion, worthlessness, inferiority, and stigmatisation, already experienced by individuals with learning disabilities. Access to leisure opportunities may also be severely limited by lack of funds if the individual does not have a job.

Feelings of loneliness and isolation were prevalent in the arson offenders interviewed. Nearly all of the fire setters in this group did not have supportive relationships before they set the fires. Many of the interviewees in this study described that they found it difficult to know who to trust in adult relationships and some individuals described having been in several abusive adult relationships. This is not uncommon amongst individuals who have suffered abuse as children (Finkelhor, 1988; Briere, 1992; Alexander et al., 1998). However, adults who have mild or borderline learning disabilities may be especially vulnerable. Increased suggestibility and dependence on others for support sets a power imbalance in their relationships and learning disabled individuals may have difficulties comprehending the appropriateness of others' behaviours or may 'go along' with the abusive intentions of others (Moss, 1999). Many of the interviewees in this study noted that relationships they had formed were with other individuals who they had either met in prison or other institutions, many of whom had significant mental health difficulties themselves. Where both partners in a relationship have significant emotional and psychological

difficulties the likelihood a of chaotic relationship is increased (Rutter, 1998). In addition, unemployment, limited access to day opportunities, difficulties with social communication and living circumstances may make meeting friends and forming supportive bonds additionally difficult for this group. The lack of social relationships is important as relationships are known to act as a buffer against distress and further offending (Amado, 1993; Briggs et al, 1998; Towl et al, 1996).

Motivations and Maintaining Factors for Setting Fires

The discussion above suggests that individuals with learning disabilities who set fires are particularly disadvantaged, having experienced lots of complete rejection, abuse, isolation and stigmatisation in their early lives which leave them with intensely painful feelings including powerlessness, shame, and anger. Later experiences such as arguments may trigger these feelings and setting fires can offer particular rewards at these times. These rewards are discussed below.

Excitement

Interviewees described gaining feelings of excitement through setting a fire, although some interviewees said they were excited only by the fires that *they* had set and not fire per se. However, the results of the fire interest rating scale suggest that the arson offenders in this study are more positively oriented and even excited by fire stimuli generally. To some extent it could be hypothesised that fire fascinates, excites or elicits pleasure in all of us, e.g. going to see a bonfire or seeking out log fires in winter. Such feelings may be increased for firesetters through increased arousal gained from feelings of power (described below) or fear and anxiety about getting caught, having set fires. Some of the interviewees described how bigger and more destructive fires, as well as watching the fire brigade attempt to put the fires out, elicited greater arousal. Bigger fires may lead to greater damage, possibly leaving the individuals that set fires with a greater feeling of power or fear. As such, the experience may involve a surge of chemicals such as adrenaline which may distract from negative and painful emotions (Babiker and Arnold, 1997). In order to be able to develop treatment approaches for this group it is important to explore the increased arousal described by the firesetters and how it functions. In addition, it is important to distinguish to what extent it is fire generally or actually setting fire themselves, that increases the arousal for firesetters.

Power

Feelings of power were experienced as a result of setting fires. This seems crucial since it stood in stark contrast to the feelings of powerlessness, lack of control and helplessness that these individuals experienced in other areas of their life, particularly in interpersonal situations. Non-learning disabled individuals might defend against feelings of powerless and lack of control in interpersonal situations by displaying aggression, hostility or compulsive self reliance (Talbot, 1996; McHenry, 1994). However, as noted previously individuals with learning disabilities do, in reality, lack power in their social contexts. They therefore have little legitimate access to power in interpersonal situations especially when faced with others who do not have a learning disability or with services and agencies. In this context, setting fires may provide a means to cause destruction

and devastation and to communicate feelings in a very powerful way. This leaves the firesetter feeling very powerful, at least temporarily, and makes firesetting very rewarding.

Release of Tension

In addition to gaining power, setting fires seems to release tension and have a soothing effect on the fire setter. It can also offer a means to expressing anger. While other ways of expressing anger may be far less destructive and more adaptive, people with learning disabilities venting angry feelings may be either severely punished (e.g. being moved to a more restrictive environment or excluded from activities) or actively discouraged. In this context, Sinason (1992) has argued that others may be unable to tolerate the negative emotions which result from having been abused or stigmatised and encourage learning disabled individuals not to express their negative feelings. In addition, for those who have been victims of abuse, interpersonal anger expression may become associated with violence, abandonment and danger (Babiker and Arnold, 1997; Gilbert and Andrews, 1998) and therefore the direct expression of anger may be viewed as dangerous. This is particularly likely to be the case if, as in the case of someone who has learning disabilities, the person who experiencing anger is in a less powerful and often dependent. Scheff (1998) describes such experiences of anger as 'helpless anger' and suggests they lead to expressions of anger through other 'passive-aggressive' means. By expressing anger through setting fires, the individual who has a learning disability is minimising repercussions such as further violence which might ensue either to themselves or others if they had engaged in interpersonal confrontation. In addition by setting fires, they express anger in a more powerful way than they believe they could ever manage alone. As well as allowing an effective expression of anger towards others, fire itself can regulate the feelings of anger and distress. Interviewees described how fire can act as a focus, almost like a meditative tool. People who self injure by cutting also describe such a focusing experience which allows them to distract themselves from the emotional pain they experience. In addition, interviewees described how they can project their negative feelings onto the fire and how the fire is able to take the negative feelings out of them, releasing tension. Such a powerful release of tension may be experienced as a highly desirable psychological and physiological state and may lead to a desire to repeat the experience. The sense of 'relief' reported may also be linked to the

after effects of the excitement that individuals described, with the adrenaline rush giving way to calmness (Babiker and Arnold, 1997). This tension relieving and mood regulating function of fire was noted by Coid (1999) amongst female arsonists who also self injured to achieve the same effect. Eventually the desire to repeat the experience may develop into a 'craving' and a perceived *need* to set fires. Eventually the individual may feel dependent on setting fires and as such, the experience of setting fires may follow the pattern of addictive behaviour which is likely to explain the repetitive nature of firesetting (Marlatt and Gordon, 1985; Jackson, 1994).

Belonging and Inclusion

Many individuals described that during the aftermath of setting fires they felt a sense of belonging or importance. This was felt above all by helping the fire brigade or by being amongst firemen when they arrived on the scene. At this point it is useful to consider the meaning attributed to the fire brigade in our culture. Firemen are the epitome of masculinity representing bravery, strength and heroism. These words are rarely used to describe learning disabled individuals who are commonly portrayed as different, vulnerable, dependent, flawed, spoiled, asexual and ungendered (Burns, 2000; Lewis, 1998; Scior, 2000; Williams, 2001). With few positive role models in the media and little access to common modes of gaining status and social acceptability, the interviewees in this study had been excluded and rejected throughout their childhood and into adulthood. At least for a while after setting a fire the interviewees seemed to experience a sense of belonging, social acceptance and even heroic status. This is very different from the painful emotions evoked from past rejections and setting fires was the only way that individuals in this study felt they had access to this status.

Getting Help and Assistance

Setting fires seemed to offer a destructive yet highly effective means of gaining help with emotional or practical problems. Gaining assistance with difficulties may be problematic for this group for several reasons. As noted above people with mild or borderline learning disabilities may lack adequate social and professional support and may have difficulties in communicating their needs effectively and assertively. Many individuals in this study believed that they had already

asked for help but had been turned away by those who should have helped them. As noted above, there were no significant differences between the three groups on the assertiveness scale and it is possible that fire setters believe they are acting in an assertive manner but this is not perceived by their opponents. However, when they set fires interviewees described that people such as professionals *had* to listen to them and help them with difficulties they were experiencing in order to prevent future risk. Clearly this has implications for access to services and support offered *before* individuals feel they have to take such drastic action as setting fires.

Planning

Some interviewees described planning the fires, at times in some depth, although such planning often reflected a good deal of naivety e.g. planning so as to minimise harm in a fire (see 'naivety' below). Such planning seemed to form an important part of the fire setting behaviour. That individuals may plan fire setting suggests that it is not always an impulsive act. Some interviewees described putting a great deal of time and effort into activities such as sketching and drawing up plans which allowed them to fantasise about firesetting, thereby increasing their fascination with fires in-between actually setting fires. Such fantasising is known amongst other offender groups to alleviate negative emotional states and also leads to greater anticipation and likelihood of repeat offending (Briggs, et al., (1997). For firesetters who have a learning disability this planning may also provide a sense of occupation and achievement not available through other means. The function of planning for the fire setter with a learning disability clearly needs more investigation.

Naivety

Interviewees demonstrated a great deal of naivety in relation to setting fires, e.g. suggesting that they could set only small fires or set fire to one part of a building without the rest of the building catching alight. This is highly likely to be at least partly a consequence of having learning disabilities and the associated limitations in anticipating the consequences of one's actions (Wehmeyer and Kelchner, 1994). This implies that education about the danger of fire is an essential part of any treatment for fire setters.

'Getting Away with It'

Fire setting was viewed by interviewees as an act with they could 'get away with'. By setting a fire and then hiding, leaving the scene or taking part in the aftermath acting as an innocent bystander, the fire setter is able to experience many of the positive consequences of fire setting and these are seen as outweighing the negative experiences of setting fires. Indeed, 'getting away with it' may offer the individual an increased sense of power or achievement. This sense of a lack of repercussions is also likely to reflect the naivety of individuals with learning disabilities who set fires. The firesetters were able to overcome 'external inhibitors' to firesetting (getting arrested etc.). However, most of us are additionally constrained by 'internal inhibitors' (e.g. knowledge that we could kill someone by setting fire to their house). The decision to set fires may be weighted by the positive experiences firesetters feel when setting fires and lack of awareness of the dangers of fire may prevent a balanced decision. Further exploration of what exactly 'getting away with it' may mean to firesetters with learning disabilities would be useful in future. It is also likely to be an important factor to consider in clinical work with firesetters who have a learning disability.

Differences between firesetters with a learning disability and firesetters in general?

It seems that in many ways firesetters with learning disabilities are similar to firesetters who do not have learning disabilities. However, there also appear to be some important factors which are specifically relevant to learning disabled individuals with regard to fire setting.

Both groups suffer significant psychosocial disadvantage in childhood with high rates of abusive experiences, significant losses and institutional care. However, those with learning disabilities are *more* vulnerable to being abused and to being placed in institutional care. When they are abused, learning disabled individuals are at a particular disadvantage with regards to the reporting and prosecution of abusers.

Although all arson offenders show high rates of being bullied or excluded at school, those with learning disabilities are particularly vulnerable in this respect e.g. by being placed in 'special classes'. Such individuals are told implicitly and explicitly from a very young age that they are

flawed, different, excluded, socially undesirable, dependent and weak. As a group they are stigmatised and socially excluded in society and often in reality have very little choice or control over their own lives. Thus, although arson offenders generally feel socially isolated and that their world is controlled by others, this is an especially powerful factor for arson offenders with learning disabilities. Even where they try to be assertive, arson offenders with learning disabilities have difficulty in being taken seriously due to a combination of ineffective social skills and low status. As with arson offenders generally, learning disabled arson offenders have few social supports to buffer against disadvantage. In addition, those with mild to borderline learning disabilities are at a distinct disadvantage in accessing services, often falling between learning disability and adult mental health departments.

For both groups firesetting seems to offer a 'passive-aggressive' way to deal with conflict, however for those with a learning disability, fire setting also offers a significant sense of power, belonging and status. Such experiences of power, belonging and status are not normally available to learning disabled individuals and, as such may make fire setting very rewarding. Other factors such as naivety regarding the nature of fire and difficulties with problem solving seem to be specific factors for fire setters with learning disabilities.

Planning of fires and fantasising about fire setting, factors which have not been investigated in the past, emerged as important factors in this study and merit further investigation.

Methodological issues and Limitations of The Current Study

1.   *Recruitment and Samples*

As noted in the method section, all repeat arson offenders in four separate secure units across a large geographical area (namely north London and further) who were willing to take part in the research and were not currently experiencing acute mental health difficulties were interviewed. However, the sample size was still rather small as there are a limited number of individuals who have learning disabilities and who set fires to be found in these institutions. The small sample size is likely to have limited the statistical power of the analysis and therefore, future studies with this group may benefit from a large scale or even nationwide study, although this was beyond the scope of the current research.

Recruiting participants who had mild or borderline learning disabilities, who had not offended and who did not have mental health difficulties was rather more difficult than was anticipated. It became apparent that many of these individuals are not in contact with health, social or voluntary services. Indeed, many of those who are not in contact with services may not define themselves as having mild or borderline learning disabilities which makes finding controls difficult for research of this type. In addition, most of those controls who refused to take part when they were approached were concerned that the research was investigating offending behaviour and they did not wish to be associated with this.

Due to the nature of the offenders who had learning disabilities and who were willing and to take part in the research, many of the comparison group of 'other offenders' were child sexual offenders. This reflects the fact that most of those in medium secure units for people with learning disabilities are either sexual offenders or arson offenders (Walker and McCabe, 1973; Woods and Mason, 1998). However, as noted, different results (e.g. significant differences on assertiveness) may have been found with a violent offender or mixed offender control group.

2. Measures

The interviewer was careful to explain all concepts in the questionnaires, which may not be clear to the participants fully until she was sure that they understood what each question meant. However, apart from the locus of control questionnaire, none of the other questionnaires have been standardised for a learning disability population. As a consequence the quantitative results in this study should be interpreted with caution (e.g. as noted above, the questionnaires were possibly vulnerable to social desirability bias). However, the questionnaires in this study were selected as there was a lack of alternatives. This highlights a clear need for the development of validated, standardised measures for future research and clinical work with the learning disability population, especially on such key concepts as self-esteem, or assertiveness. Effective measures for this population might employ role play, video tapes, or observer ratings as well as self report.

3. Quality of the Data Obtained from this study

The data obtained from the questionnaires and particularly the qualitative interviews was extremely rich and illustrates how, individuals with a learning disability can participate in research regarding their own subjective thoughts and feelings. In the past, people with learning disabilities were deemed to have insufficient ability to form their own views or to reliably report their own feelings for these to be the focus of research. If people with learning disabilities were included in research, it was usually the practice to seek confirmation of any information provided from more able informants (Atkinson, 1988; Bender, 1993). Undoubtedly, issues such as reliability, responsiveness and acquiescence need to be borne in mind when completing research with people with learning disabilities. However, over the past decade it has been increasingly recognised that, given a research approach which is sensitive to their needs, people with learning disabilities are indeed able to report their views and experiences (Rapley and Antaki, 1996; Ward, 1998; Keirnan, 1999).

The rich data obtained during interviews suggests that qualitative research lends itself particularly well to this population as it allows individuals who may have difficulty understanding complex and

researcher imposed concepts, such as 'anxious', express their feelings and concerns in their own words (Rapley and Antarki, 1996). It should be acknowledged, however, that the participants of this study all had mild or borderline learning disabilities and good communication skills. Methods would need to be adapted to elicit the feelings and concerns of individuals with more severe disabilities and there is a growing literature on how this can be achieved (Rapley and Antaki, 1996; Ward, 1998; Kiernan, 1999).

The quality of the information given during the qualitative interviews in this research is also likely to have been influenced by the interactive style and techniques adopted by the interviewer (described fully on p.41) such as putting the individual at ease, building rapport, allowing individuals to 'tell their story' and probing more sensitive issues towards the middle of the interview.

4.   *Reliability and Validity*

Sample Biases: Through discussion with clinicians experienced in forensic settings, the researcher concluded that firesetters with learning disabilities, if recognised as such, are unlikely to be sent to prison. The most likely place of committal for these offenders would be medium secure units (MSUs) and high secure units. The researcher recruited from MSUs as these were more accessible and, as several MSUs were recruited from, greater numbers of fire setters with learning disabilities could be invited to participate. Therefore findings cannot be generalised to individuals in high secure units whose offences may be of a more severe or repetitive nature.

In line with good practice for qualitative research (Elliott, et al., 1999), the researcher did attempt to outline the characteristics of the sample including living situation, level of learning disabilities, gender and ethnic group.

Although the researcher recruited exhaustively within a wide geographical area for any firesetters with a learning disability, no firesetters with moderate or severe learning disabilities were found.

This poses the question as to whether people with moderate and severe learning disabilities do not set fires or whether they are treated differently with regards to being charged and convicted of their firesetting. Obviously the research cannot be generalised to firesetters with more severe learning disabilities, if indeed they exist (see Implications for Future Research p. 107).

Researcher Bias: It is important to emphasise that although the analysis of the qualitative data was influenced by grounded theory, as noted previously (see Method Section), the researcher was guided by a functional analysis framework. In addition the researcher was also influenced by the findings of research from the general population of firesetters and interested in identifying whether or not these are applicable to fire setters with learning disabilities. This may have, to some extent, constrained what participants talked about, but the researcher did attempt to broaden out the focus and include questions on other areas.

Credibility Checks: In order to enhance the credibility of the qualitative categories that the researcher developed, the categories were grounded in examples for the reader to see throughout. In addition, the analysis and supporting data were reviewed at each stage by a Clinical Psychologist who has several years experience working with people with learning disabilities. The Clinical Psychologist made suggestions of possible changes or further developments for the analysis, these were discussed and implemented when a consensus between the researcher and Clinical Psychologist was reached. A 'member check' (where findings are checked with original informants (Elliott et al., 1999) was not carried out in addition to this credibility check because by the time the analysis was carried out, several of the participants had moved on from the medium secure units where the researcher had interviewed them

Clinical Implications of this Study

There are several clinical implications to working with arson offenders with learning disabilities as a result of this study.

1. *Stigmatisation and Exclusion:*

As noted above, individuals with a learning disability are devalued, stigmatised and excluded in our society and this seems to be a crucial factor for the firesetters interviewed. This is a huge social issue and may make the effective treatment of arson offenders with a learning disability particularly difficult. However, it seems essential to include work on feelings of stigma or shame in any therapeutic work. In addition it seems important for firesetters to develop a positive sense of who they are, including as a gendered person, e.g. by exploring issues of masculinity. This is important since through firesetting, many of the participants in this study wished to identify with figures such as firemen who are the epitome of masculinity, and this was in stark contrast to how they saw themselves in reality. Social constructionist approaches and narrative therapies particularly lend themselves to the examination of negative (Clegg, 1993; White, 1995; White and Epston, 1990) societal attitudes and enhance empowerment.

2. *Social Support*

Arson offenders with a learning disability are particularly socially isolated. Treatment with this group will need to enhance social skills, including effective communication, assertion skills and skills in developing and maintaining supportive relationships. It is important that arson offenders are linked into systems where they can gain effective support when required. In this regard local mental health and learning disability services need to agree between them which service is most appropriate for each individual, particularly for individuals who fall in the 'borderline' range and as a result often find themselves excluded from both learning disability and adult mental health services.

3.   *Conflict Management*

As conflict appears to be a particular antecedent for firesetting this should be a focus for therapeutic work.   Such work may involve developing social problem solving skills, conflict resolution strategies, negotiation training and anger management. It is likely to involve ongoing support for individuals who have learning disabilities, as flexible problem solving and generalisation of new skills to varying situations may be difficult for people with learning disabilities and they will need regular reinforcement to utilise any newly acquired skill.

4.   *Coping with Negative Emotions*

Developing more helpful ways of coping with negative emotions such as anxiety, anger, boredom and frustration is essential for this group, as these often seem to act as triggers to firesetting. In particular, fire setting provides powerful arousal and a release of tension.   Individuals might be assisted to gain this type of sensation through other legitimate activities such as exercise.   In addition meditation, or mindfulness (a technique which focuses the individual in the present and therefore distracts them from thinking about worries or fears) might be useful tools, if adapted for use with people with learning disabilities, as it has been found to be effective with individuals who self injure (Linehan, 1995).   In addition, as noted in the discussion, individuals with learning disabilities are often at a disadvantage in having their opinions respected in society and this may make work on frustration tolerance essential.

5.   *Education*

Education about fires and the dangers of fire is essential in light of the naivety of the interviewees in this study.   As well as educating about the danger of fire, education about how others in society view fire setters may help to enhance many of the internal inhibitors to firesetting, especially as many individuals seek a sense of acceptance and belonging through setting fires yet commonly achieve the very opposite.

6.   *Access to Achievement and Status*

Gaining achievement and status seemed to be a fundamental motivation behind setting fires for many of the individuals in this study as they had little access to these otherwise. It is important for people with learning disabilities to have access to varied opportunities for achievement and fulfilment through work and leisure. As noted above, such opportunities are currently limited for individuals with learning disabilities. However, improved opportunities for leisure and meaningful paid employment have been identified as targets by the Department of Health in the National Strategy (D.O.H., 2001).

9.   *Individual Assessment and Relapse Prevention*

Most crucially it would be essential that assessment and treatment of firesetters with learning disabilities is based on individual assessment of the person and the function of firesetting for them. Individual relapse prevention plans should also be developed to counter the addictive nature of firesetting.

10.   *Other Mental Health Difficulties*

Treatment should also focus on any additional mental health difficulties, such as psychosis or drug and alcohol abuse. At times this has been problematic, as drug and alcohol services often deem their treatment programmes unsuitable and exclude individuals who have learning disabilities (Christian and Poling, 1997; Moore, 1991) and, as noted above, specialist mental health services are frequently not accessible to this group. It is now widely recognised that this is a major issue for people with learning disabilities and improving access has been outlined as a key target in the National Strategy (D.O.H., 2001).

11.   *Risk Assessment*

Attention to the factors identified in this study as particularly important to the development of firesetting amongst individuals with mild or borderline learning disabilities (including external locus of control, feelings of power, excitement and belonging experienced as a consequence of firesetting) might indicate whether there is high risk of re-offending amongst individuals who have

set one fire. Where such a risk is identified these issues should be incorporated in a treatment plan and follow-up should be planned carefully the address the key issues highlighted in this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study highlights several areas for further research and these are summarised below.

1. *Development of Standardised Measures*

It is essential that standardised measures for key psychological concepts, such as self esteem and assertiveness, are developed for this group. This would enhance both clinical work and further research with people who have learning disabilities.

2. *Impact of Having a Mild/Borderline Learning Disability*

Often, people who have learning disabilities are considered as an internally consistent group. However, the firesetters in this study had mild to borderline learning disabilities and it seems, did not always identify themselves as having a learning disability. However, this group were also not able to consider themselves fully part of the dominant, non-learning disabled group as they were aware of their intellectual difficulties, and this increased their vulnerability to negative self image etc. It would be useful for more research to study the experiences of this group of individuals who have intellectual difficulties but do not quite fit into learning disability or mainstream adult services.

3. *Possible Over-representation of People with Learning Disabilities Amongst Arson Offenders*

It is known that a high proportion of those in medium secure units for people with learning disabilities are charged with arson. Similarly, a few studies have suggested that a high proportion of those who set fires have low average intellect or are mentally handicapped (Lewis and Yarnell, 1951; Rice and Harris, 1995). However, the percentage of people with learning disabilities amongst the total firesetting population is not clear. Undoubtedly, differences in methodology and the definitions of learning disabilities used it difficult to obtain a true picture. Future studies with

clear methodology, defining criteria and strong research design should clarify whether people with learning disabilities are indeed over represented in the fire setting population.

4. *Possible Under-representation of People with More Severe Learning Disabilities Amongst Firesetters*

During recruitment it became apparent that there were no firesetters with moderate or severe learning disabilities in the four medium secure units accessed for this study. Instead all firesetters identified functioned within the mild or borderline learning disability range. While people with more severe learning disabilities are likely to have far less access to fire paraphernalia and less opportunities for firesetting, this finding still seems somewhat surprising. It would be very interesting for future research to examine whether people with moderate and severe learning disabilities do simply never engage in setting fires sufficiently serious to involve the police and legal services or whether they do indeed set such fires but these are dealt with very differently by carers and rarely, if ever, result in criminal proceedings.

5. *Planning and Fantasy in Firesetting*

Although not identified in previous studies, this study found that planning may be an important factor in firesetting. The function of planning and to what extent this involves fantasy and increases desire to offend (as in sexual offending) may be a useful area for future research.

6. *Excitement and Arousal*

As noted above, firesetters in this study reported experiencing excitement and arousal as a major consequence of setting fires. However, the exact nature of this excitement is not clear, for example the firesetter could be aroused because of power or fear. Therefore it would be useful for future research to explore the meaning of this excitement for individuals and the cognitions and physiological sensations that accompany such excitement.

7.   The Predictive Nature of The Factors Found

It would be very useful for future research to examine whether the factors identified in this study as important to the development of firesetting, can predict whether someone who has set one fire is going to reoffend.

Conclusions

The current study has outlined a number of factors which seem to be important for the development of firesetting amongst individuals with mild and borderline learning disabilities.

For the sample in this study issues of power and social acceptance seemed to be important and to some extent this may make treatment difficult for this group who are largely excluded and disempowered within our society.

While the study aimed to study firesetting across the learning disability population, extensive recruiting from medium secure units over a large geographical area did not identify any firesetters with moderate or severe learning disabilities.

The recent White Paper (D.O.H., 2001) identifies the social inclusion of people with learning disabilities as a key target and sets out steps to work towards this broad target. However, it is important to recognise that it is an immense target and changes made by services are unlikely to have the same positive and significant impacts for all individuals with learning disabilities across all areas.

In addition, it is important to recognise that people who have mild to borderline learning disabilities are faced with particular issues that somewhat distinguish them from people with moderate to severe learning disabilities. Such issues arise, at least partly, out of not identifying with a learning disability group and not being accepted as part of the general population. Several implications for clinical work for firesetters with learning disabilities have been identified and areas for future research have been suggested.

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APPENDIX 1

Ethics Approval Confirmation

Aneurin Bevan House
81 Commercial Road
London E1 1RD

Natalie Hiser
10 Tormount Road
Plumstead
London SE18 1QB

Tel: 020 7655 6600
Fax: 020 7655 6666

SB/RI/N00138

Friday 23rd March 2001

Dear Ms Hiser

Re: N/00/138 - An investigation into casual and contributing factors for arson by individuals with learning disabilities

Thank you for your letter of 25th January 2000 addressing the points of the Sub-Committee's earlier letter. I am happy to tell you that I am now able to approve this study on Chairman's action to be noted at future meeting of the Sub-Committee.

Please note the following conditions to the approval:

1. The Sub-Committee's approval is for the length of time specified in your application. If you expect your project to take longer to complete (i.e. collection of data), a letter from the principal investigator to the Chairman will be required to further extend the research. This will help the Sub-Committee to maintain comprehensive records.

2. Any changes to the protocol must be notified to the Sub-Committee. Such changes may not be implemented without the Sub-Committee or Chairman's approval.

3. The Sub-Committee should be notified immediately of any serious adverse events or if the study is terminated prematurely.

4. You are responsible for consulting with colleagues and/or other groups who may be involved or affected by the research, such as extra work for laboratories.

5.   You must ensure that, where appropriate, nursing and other staff are made aware that research in progress on patients with whom they are concerned has been approved by the Sub-Committee.

6.   The Sub-Committee should be sent one copy of any publication arising from your study, or a summary if there is to be no publication.

I should be grateful if you would inform all concerned with the study of the above decision.

Your application has been approved on the understanding that you comply with Good Clinical Practice and that all raw data is retained and available for inspection for 15 years.

Please quote the above study number in any future related correspondence.

Yours sincerely

SANDRA BURKE
Acting Chairman
ELCHA Research Ethics Sub-Committee

Enfield & Haringey **NHS**
Health Authority

20 July 2000

Ms Susan Carvalho
Head of Clinical Psychology
Camlet Lodge
Chase Farm Hospital
The Ridgeway
Enfield, Middlesex

Dear Ms Carvalho

769 – An investigation into causal and contributing factors for arson by individuals with learning difficulties

Acting under delegated authority, I write to inform you that the amendments to the above study contained in your letter dated 9 July 2000 have been approved.

The committee looks forward to receiving a copy of your interim report in six months time or at end of your study if this is sooner.

Yours sincerely

Christine Hamilton
LREC Administrator
(on behalf of the LREC Chairman)

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Ms Natalie Hiser
10 Tormount Road
Plumstead
LONDON SE18 1QB

23 November 2000

Dear Natalie,

I am pleased to inform you that your study: "Learning Disabled Arson Offenders – A Quantative/Qualitative Study", has now been approved by Kneesworth House Hospital Ethics Committee. Please liaise with Dr. Neil Cairns, Associate Specialist on Extension 228 and/or Dr. Shawn Mosher, Clinical Psychologist on Extension 388 re suitable patients on Nightingale Ward, our Learning Disabled Unit.

I wish you well with your project. Please do let me know how you get on.

Regards,

Yours sincerely,

Kathy Higson

Dr Gareth V. Hughes
Head of Psychological Services,
Kneesworth House Hospital
And Research Fellow
Institute of Criminology
Cambridge University

pp

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**LOCAL RESEARCH ETHICS
COMMITTEE**
Incorporating West Herts Community Health
NHS Trust & Horizon NHS Trust

Our ref:WHO 2/00

Ms Natalie Hiser
10 Tormount Road
Plumstead
London SE18 1QB

20 November 2000

Dear Ms Hiser

re: An investigation into causal & contributing factors for arson by individuals with learning disabilities

Thank you for your letter dated 29 October and the revised application form in respect of the above mentioned study. The study has now been approved by LREC at its committee meeting on the 17 November 2000.

The committee would appreciate receiving progress reports, eg annually and a full report and evaluation at the conclusion of the study.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Russell Wynn Jones
Chair, West Herts Health Authority LREC.

APPENDIX 2

Information for Participants and Consent

My name is Natalie Hiser. I am from a college in London.

I am doing a study about why some people commit arson and others do not. This will help staff to know how to help people who commit arson.

I am coming to .... soon. I would very much like to talk to you.

I will ask you some questions about how you feel about your life and your relationships. I will also be asking you about how you feel about fire.

I will come to see you twice. I will talk to you for about 1 hour each time I come.

The questions I will ask you are not a test and there are no right or wrong answers.

If you want to stop at any time, just tell me and we will stop.

I am not staff at .... and what you tell me will be private. (I would only have to tell someone, if you told me you were going to hurt someone else or yourself.) If you talk to me, it will not affect your treatment at ....

You will not get into trouble if you do not want to talk to me.

Have a chat with your keyworker. If you have any questions or worries about what I will be doing here. I will come to introduce myself before I begin.

Notes from Introductory Meeting

1. Are there any good things about talking to me?

2. Are there any bad things about talking to me?

3. What can you do if you decide that you do not want to talk to me anymore?

CONSENT FORM

I (name) ....

of (address) ....

I understand what the study is about. I know what I am being asked to do in the study. I understand the pros and cons of taking part. I know that I can stop the interviews at any time.

Signed .... Date:

I have explained the nature, demands and foreseeable risks of the above research to the subject in a way that I am sure that they understand.

signed.. Date:

APPENDIX 3

Questionnaires and Interview Schedule

NORWICKI-STRICKLAND INTERNAL EXTERNAL SCALE

1. Do you believe that most problems with solve themselves   Y/N
   if you just don't fool with them?

2. Do you believe that you can stop yourself from catching a   Y/N
   cold?

3. Are some people just born lucky?   Y/N

4. Most of the time do you feel that getting good marks   Y/N
   meant a lot to you?

5. Are you often blamed for things that are not your fault?   Y/N

6. Do you believe that if somebody works or studies hard   Y/N
   enough, that they can pass any subject?

7. Do you feel that most of the time it doesn't pay to try hard,   Y/N
   because things never turn out right anyway?

8. Do you think that if things start out well in the morning , it Y/N
   will be a good day, no matter what you do?

9. Do you feel that, most of the time, parents listen to what   Y/N
   their children have to say?

10. Do you believe that wishing can make good things happen?   Y/N

11. When you get punished, does it usually seem like its for no   Y/N
    reason at all?

12. Most of the time, do you find it hard to change a friend's Y/N
    mind?

13. Do you think that cheering, more than luck, helps a team to   Y/N
    win?

14. Did you feel that it was nearly impossible to change your parents' mind about anything? Y/N

15. Do you believe that parents should allow children to make most of their own decisions? Y/N

16. Do you feel that when you do something wrong there's very little you can do to make it right? Y/N

17. Do you believe that most people are just born good at sports? Y/N

18. Are most of the other people your age stronger than your are? Y/N

19. Do you feel that one of the best ways to handle problems is not to think about them? Y/N

20. Do you feel that you have a lot of choice in deciding whom your friends? Y/N

21. If you find a four leaf clover, do you believe that it might bring you good luck? Y/N

22. Did you feel that whether you did your homework or not had much to do with what marks you got a school? Y/N

23. Do you feel that when a person your age decides to hit you that there is nothing you can do about it? Y/N

24. Have you ever had a good luck charm? Y/N

25. Do you believe that whether or not people like you depends on how you act? Y/N

26. Did your parents usually help if you asked them to? Y/N

27. Have you felt that when people were angry at you, it was for Y/N

no reason at all?

28. Do you feel that, by what you do today, you can change what happens tomorrow?   Y/N

29. Do you believe that, when bad things are going to happen, they are just going to happen no matter what you do to try and stop them?   Y/N

30. Do you think that people can get their own way, it they just keep trying?   Y/N

31. Most of the time, do you find it useless to try and get your own way?   Y/N

32. Do you feel that, when good things happen, it is because of hard work?   Y/N

33. Do you feel that when someone your age wants to be your enemy, there is nothing you can do to change this ?   Y/N

34. Do you feel that it is easy to get friends to do what you want them to?   Y/N

35. Do you usually feel that you have little to say about what you get to eat?   Y/N

36. Do you feel that when someone doesn't like you, that there is nothing you can do about it?   Y/N

37. Did you feel that it was almost useless to try at school, because other children were just more clever than you?   Y/N

38. Do you believe that if you make plans, things turn out better?   Y/N

39. Do you feel that you have little to say about what your family decides to do?

    Y/N

40. Do think that it is better to be clever than to be lucky?   Y/N

Assertiveness Questionnaire

For each of the following situtations tell me:

1. How anxious/worried you would feel if you had to:...................

2. How likely is it that you would ....

1. Say something nice about a friend

2. Ask a favour of someone

3. Apologise if you are at fault

4. Tell a person you really care about he/she does something that bothers you

5. Ask for a pay rise

6. Admit if you don't understand something

7. Turn down someone who asks to borrow money

8. Begin a conversation with a stranger

9. Request a meeting with someone

10. Apply for a job

11. Ask whether you have upset someone

12. Discuss with someone, if they criticise your behaviour

13. Return broken items eg. to a shop

14. Disagree with someone

15. Resist sexual advances when you are not interested

16. Tell a person that you feel he/she has done something unfair to you

17. Resist pressure to drink

18. Resist a close friend's unfair demands

19. Tell an employer that you want to leave the job

20. Resist pressure to use drugs

22. Say 'no' to friends

23. Ask someone to give something back that they had borrowed

24. Continue a conversation when someone is disagreeing with you.

25. Ask a person who is annoying you to stop

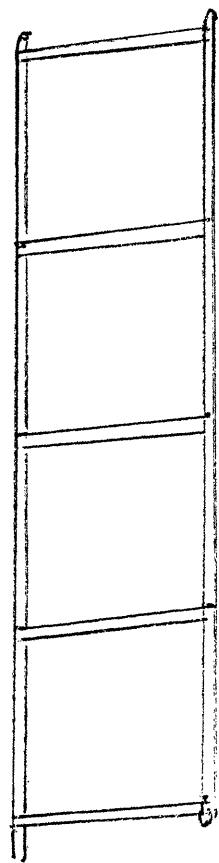| 1	2	3	4	5
very happy/ excited	little bit happy	not happy or sad	a bit unhappy	very unhappy/ very worried

5. Very Likely

4. Quite Likely

3. A little bit likely

2. Not very likely

1. Not likely at all

Part 1 Directions

A number of statements that people use to describe themselves are given below. Read each statement and then blacken the appropriate circle on the Rating Sheet to indicate how you feel *right now*. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement. Mark the answer that *best* describes your *present feelings*.

Fill in ① for *Not at all*	Fill in ② for *Somewhat*	Fill in ③ for *Moderately so*	Fill in ④ for *Very much so*

How I Feel Right Now

1. I am furious
2. I feel irritated
3. I feel angry
4. I feel like yelling at somebody
5. I feel like breaking things
6. I am mad
7. I feel like banging on the table
8. I feel like hitting someone
9. I feel like swearing
10. I feel annoyed
11. I feel like kicking somebody
12. I feel like cursing out loud
13. I feel like screaming
14. I feel like pounding somebody
15. I feel like shouting out loud

Part 2 Directions

Read each of the following statements that people have used to describe themselves, and then blacken the appropriate circle to indicate how you *generally* feel or react. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement. Mark the answer that *best* describes how you *generally* feel or react.

Fill in ① for *Almost never*	Fill in ② for *Sometimes*	Fill in ③ for *Often*	Fill in ④ for *Almost always*

How I Generally Feel

16. I am quick tempered
17. I have a fiery temper
18. I am a hotheaded person
19. I get angry when I'm slowed down by others' mistakes
20. I feel annoyed when I am not given recognition for doing good work
21. I fly off the handle
22. When I get mad, I say nasty things
23. It makes me furious when I am criticized in front of others
24. When I get frustrated, I feel like hitting someone
25. I feel infuriated when I do a good job and get a poor evaluation

Part 3 Directions

Everyone feels angry or furious from time to time, but people differ in the ways that they react when they are angry. A number of statements are listed below which people use to describe their reactions when they feel *angry or furious*. Read each statement and then blacken the appropriate circle to indicate how *often* you *generally* react or behave in the manner described when you are feeling angry or furious. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement.

Fill in ① for *Almost never*	Fill in ② for *Sometimes*	Fill in ③ for *Often*	Fill in ④ for *Almost always*

How I Generally React or Behave When Angry or Furious...

26. I control my temper
27. I express my anger
28. I take a deep breath and relax
29. I keep things in
30. I am patient with others
31. If someone annoys me, I'm apt to tell him or her how I feel
32. I try to calm myself as soon as possible
33. I pout or sulk
34. I control my urge to express my angry feelings
35. I lose my temper
36. I try to simmer down
37. I withdraw from people
38. I keep my cool
39. I make sarcastic remarks to others
40. I try to soothe my angry feelings
41. I boil inside, but I don't show it
42. I control my behavior
43. I do things like slam doors
44. I endeavor to become calm again
45. I tend to harbor grudges that I don't tell anyone about
46. I can stop myself from losing my temper
47. I argue with others
48. I reduce my anger as soon as possible
49. I am secretly quite critical of others
50. I try to be tolerant and understanding
51. I strike out at whatever infuriates me
52. I do something relaxing to calm down
53. I am angrier than I am willing to admit
54. I control my angry feelings
55. I say nasty things
56. I try to relax
57. I'm irritated a great deal more than people are aware of

3 - Very much

2 - quite

1 - a bit

0 - Not at all

4 Nearly Always

3 Often

Sometimes

2

almost never.

1
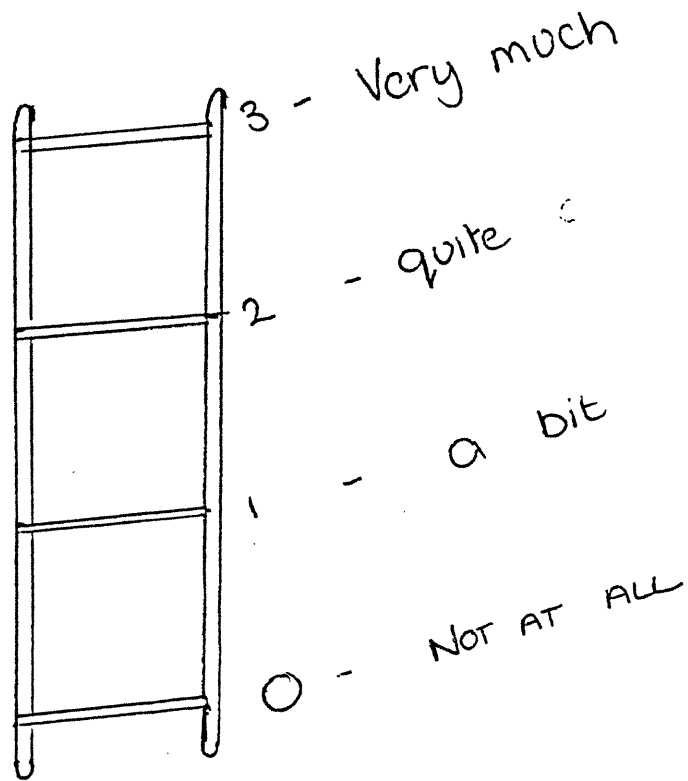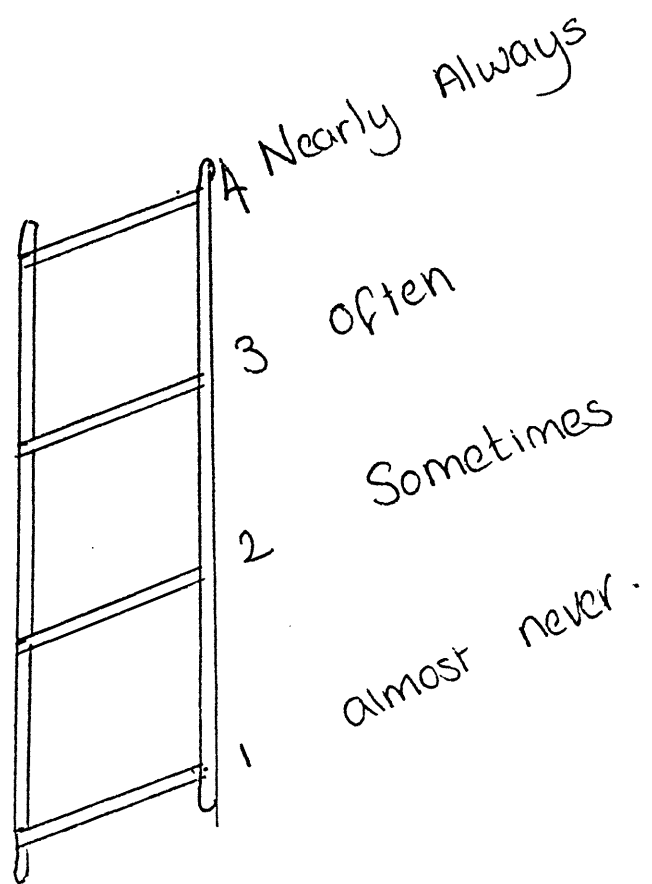
Fire Interest Rating Scale

How would you feel:

1. Watching an ordinary fire in a grate in an ordinary house?

2. Watching a house burn down?

3. Seeing the firemen get their equipment ready?

4. Striking a match to light a cigarette.

5. Going to a police station to be questioned about a fire?

6. Seeing the firemen hosing the fire?

7. Watching People run from a fire?

8. Watching a fire engine come down the road?

9. Watching a person with his clothes on fire?

10. Watching a bonfire outdoors, like on bonfire night?

11. Having a box of matches in your pocket?

12. Striking a match to set fire to a building?

13. Seeing a hotel on fire on the TV news?

14. Giving matches back to someone else?
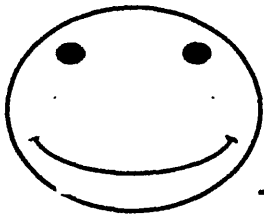
1	2	3	4	5
very happy/ excited	little bit happy	not happy or sad	a bit unhappy	very unhappy/ upset.

	Me	Friend	Sibling	Ideal

1.   I have good ideas

2.   I get nervous

3.   I look nice

4.   I cause trouble

5.   I am good at work

6.   I give up easily

7.   I am good at making friends

8.   People forget that I am there

9.   I do as I am told

10.   I am lazy

11.   I am good at making things with my hands

12.   I am slow at work.

13.   I get on with the opposite sex.

14.   I am lonely

15.   I am helpful to others.

16.   I tell lies.

17.   I am good at sport.

18.   I make a mess of things that I try

19. I have fun with friends

20. I am unhelpful to tothers.

21. I get picked on

22. I am happy

23. I am unkind to others

24. I can speak well in front of others.

25. I never make a mess of things
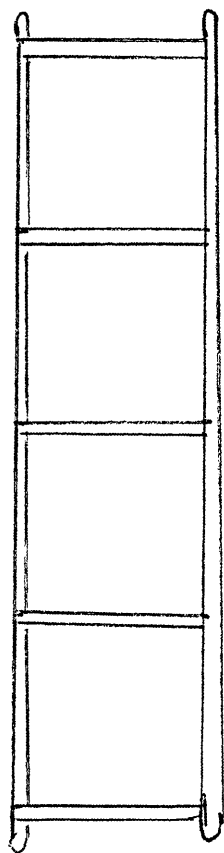
5 - ALWAYS

4 - MOST OF THE TIME

3 - SOMETIMES

2 - ALMOST NEVER

1 - NEVER

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. **_Fire:_**

i. **I'd like to ask you a little bit about other people who set fires. Why do you think other people set fires?**

>   What do you think they feel when they see the fire?
>   Do you think that they want to hurt people?

ii. **I'd like to ask you a bit about fires in general, how do you feel about fire?**

>   Do you think that, in general fire is a good thing? Why?
>   Do you like looking at small fires eg. a gas fire in a front room?
>   What is nice about it?
>   What isnt nice about it?
>   Do you like looking at bigger fires eg. in a house or barn?
>   What is nice about it?
>   What isnt nice about it?
>   Do you think that fires can ever be not good?
>   What is not good about them?

iii. **Can you tell a bit about the time when you set the fire?** (refer to subjects' index offence or latest episode of fire setting known about).

>   Why do you think you set the fire?
>   What was happening in your life before you set the fire?
>   What was good about your life then?
>   What was bad about your life then?
>   How did you feel?
>   How did you start the fire?
>   What did it feel like?
>   What happened after you set the fire?
>   What happened to you? What happened to the victim?
>   What did it feel like after you set the fire?
>   What was good about setting the fire? What was not so good about
>   setting the fire?

2. **_Early History_**

I want to ask you a few questions about some more personal things:

i. **What was life like for you when you were a child?**

>   Overall, was your childhood a happy or sad time?
>   Did you grow up with your family? If not, where?
>   Who was in your family (draw a family tree)?

3.   *Parents*

i.   **Describe your mum. What was she like?**
ii.   **Describe your dad. What was he like?**

> Did your parents have a happy relationship or did they fight or argue a
> lot?
> What would your mother do if you did something well?
> What would your father do if you did something well?
> What would your mother do if you were upset or sad?
> What would you father do if you were upset or sad?
> What would your mother do if you were naughty?
> What would you father do if you were naugty?

> What is your best memory of your parents? What did they do that made
> you happy?
> What is your worst memory of your parents? What did they do that
> made you sad?

4.   *Siblings*

i.   **Do you have brothers or sisters or step brothers or sisters? Describe Them.**

> Did you get on with them?
> What is your best memory of them?
> What is your worst memory of them?

5.   *Others General:*

i.   **Who else was important to you when you were little (eg.
friends/teachers/grandparent)?**

> Did you feel that you could do most things as well as other children
> when you were young?

> Could you do the same things (eg. in school) that your brother/sister
> could?
> If no, how did that make you feel?

6.   *School:*

i.   **What was school like for you**

> What type of school did you go to? (eg. mainstream, 'special', EBD)
> Where you happy at school?
> What did you like most/least about school?
> Did you find the work easy or hard at school?
> How did you get on with the teachers?

Did you ever get into trouble at school?
If yes, What for? How did this make you feel?
Did you have many friends at school? If no, why do you think this was?
Were you ever bullied at school?

7. *Relationships:*

i. **Do you like being with other people or do you prefer to be alone?**

Do you have any friends now?
Would you like to have more friends?
Did you find it easy to make friends?
What do you like to do with your friends?
Do you have a boy/girlfriend/partner?
Can you tell me a bit about that relationship?

8. *Self:*

i. **Are you happy with your life?**

What do you like about your life?
What do you not like about your life (apart from being in the MSU)
If you could change one thing about your life, what would it be? (apart from getting out of the Medium secure Unit).
What do you like most about yourself?
What do you like least about yourself?
Do you ever get angry with yourself or want to hurt yourself? When?
If you could change one things about yourself what would it be?

How do you feel most of the time (eg. happy, sad, angry)?

9. *Future:*

i. **What do you want most out of life in the future?**

When you are (insert age 5 yrs older) what would you like things to be like ?
How likely do you think that this is?
What will life be like for you when you get out of the unit?

File Check List

1.   Subject No: ......

2.   IQ. FS .... V............. P.................

3.   Male/Female

4.   Age: ....

5.   Arsonist/Sexual Offender/Violent Offender/Control/Other ....

6.   For Arsonists: No. of Arson Offences convicted ....
                         No. of Arson offences known but not convicted ....

7.   Place of arson: ....
            ....
            ....
            ....
            ....

8.   Age at first offence: ....

9.   Living Situation at Time of Offence ....

FAMILY HISTORY

1.   Mental health problems
        mother ....father ....

2.   No. of brothers .... sisters .... in childhood home

3.   Before age 16 did participant experience:

Death of Mother?   Y/N   Age ....
Death of Father?   Y/N   Age ....
Death of other close family member?   Y/N   Age ....
Adopted?   Y/N   Age ....
Other Carers? Specify ....

5.   Was the participant cared for by the same people up to
     age 16?   Y/N

     If no, longest time cared for by one person: ....

6.   Ever in Children's/Community Home/Institution
     Other ....?   Age 1st went ....
                                                            Age Last left ....
                                                            Total time ....

8.   Other Separations from parents or main caregivers?   Age ....
                                                            How Long.........

9.   Is the participant known to have suffered childhood abuse?
     Sexual Abuse?   Y/N
     Physical Abuse?   Y/N
     Neglect?   Y/N

     any action taken as result of abuse
     e.g. move to children's home ....

SCHOOLING

1.   Truancy?
     Suspensions? ....
     Expulsions?   ....

2.   College? Y/N   Age attended ....

3.   Employment History:

     Never had a job   Y/N
     If have had work, how long for? ....

CHILDHOOD PROBLEMS

1.   Self injury
2.   Fire setting
3.   Cruelty to animals
4.   Stealing/Shop lifting
5.   Fighting/Violence
6.   Bullying other children
7.   Vandalism/destroying property
8.   Sexualised behaviour
9.   Other ....

MEDICAL HISTORY

Physical illnesses ....

Physical Disability ....

Disfigurements ....

Speech impediments ....

Other relevant medical history ....

Psychiatric diagnoses ....

Drug and Alcohol Problems ....

APPENDIX 4

Criteria for File Check List Categoires

Criteria for File Check List Categories

Definitions of abuse and neglect are taken from *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2000)* produced by the Department of Health.

Abuse and Neglect

A person may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institution or community setting: by those known to them or strangers.

i.   Physical Abuse

Physical Abuse may involve hitting, shaking throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning suffocating or otherwise causing harm to a child (2.4)

ii.   Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape or buggery) or non-penetrative Acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at or in the production of pornographic material or watching activities or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. (2.6)

iii.   Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. It may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, failing to protect a child from physical harm or danger, or the failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

iv.   Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Drug and alcohol use was categorised as substance abuse if the person was described as dependent or addicted and the drug and alcohol use impacted on the person's life in a detrimental way.

v.   Significant early Losses

Significant Periods in Care: Significant periods in care were included if the child had spent 6 months or more living away from their natural parents in an institution or with foster carers.

Death of a Close Relative: This included deaths of those in the immediate family e.g. parents or brother or sister, before the participant was 16 years old.

vi.   Significant Mental Health Problems or Learning Disabilities in Parents

This category included mental illness in parents (e.g. depression, psychosis); alcohol problems of parents; or learning disabilities.

vii.   Additional Disabilities

This category included speech deficits, facial disfigurements, physical disabilities, and hearing deficits.

viii.   Self Injury

This category included past suicide attempts or if the participant was known to have a history of other forms of self injury such as cutting or burning themselves.

ix.   Paid Employment or Work Scheme

This category included spending at least 6 months or more in either paid employment or in another day time work scheme. This did not necessarily mean that individuals were in employment at the time of the offence or the study.

x.   Childhood Problems

This included a list of behaviours (bullying, being bullied, stealing, vandalism or destroying property, cruelty to animals, fighting or violence, sexualised behaviour, and self injury). The number of these factors presence or absence provided an indication of childhood disturbance (Rutter, 1998).

xi.   Mental Health

This factor was assessed only for arson and other offenders and included any mental health diagnosis under DSM-IV, that had been diagnosed by a psychiatric professional.

APPENDIX 5

A Transcript of One Interview with an Arson Offender

ARSON RESEARCH INTERVIEW.

Participant- 1

Why do you think other people set fires?

I don't know, maybe like, somebody, you know what I mean, might get a kick from it.

What do you think they feel when they see the fire?

Probably, like, they might feel excited. Some people might feel different ways, isn't it, some people might feel different. Like, some people might feel angry and some people might feel excited, they might feel different. Like expression.

Do you think that people want to hurt people when they set fires?

Not necessarily no. Because I know that maybe some people do and some people don't. It depends on maybe what the reason is. Some people like, might like to get people back and that is a way to get people back, you know, setting a fire to something that belongs to that company.

How do you feel about fire?

I think that fire is dangerous. It can get out of hand. But some people don't realise the situation about fire setting, how dangerous fires are. Some people, don't know the difference between serious fires and minor fires. Minor fires is like a camp fire and it might be away from the trees. You've got to treat fires like, severe, minor and an angry one. There are three main difference types.

what do you mean by an angry one?

Well an angry one is when its against somebody. When your'e against someone and .... set fires to this person. Because he ..... maybe .... friends of mine and that's the way of getting him back.

What's a severe fire?

A severe fire is when like its a building. and maybe there's people trapped inside it. It means more larger than an angry one and a minor one is just like a camp fire.

Do you think fire in general is a good things?

Well, ... it can keep you want cant it. Keep you warm in the winter. If you didn't have any fire at all, how are you going to keep warm?

Do you like looking at small fires. Like gas fires?

Not really no.

Can you think of anything that might be nice about that?

I just find looking at the flames and that the colours in the fire sometimes it changes. Sometimes you've got like yellow and blue and orange and sometimes you see them all mixed together.

So is that what is nice about looking at a fire?

Yes.

What isn't nice about looking at a fire?

Maybe its dangerous, something might happen. If you stand to close, maybe something might spark or maybe you might fall in. You might be looking at it and maybe you might fall into it.

Do you like looking at bigger fires in a house or barn?

I used to.

What did you think was nice about it?

well I liked the way that fire was, like flames and smoke and all that.

how was it nice?

well it was like this flame was like going up in the air. Like with smoke and that.

What did that feel like for you?

It felt all right. But I know some house fires or some barn fires sometimes feels all right but sometimes maybe not.

So what wasn't nice about it?

Because it was too close to a building.

So sometimes its nice to see a barn or house on fire because its nice to see the smoke and flames up in the air, but sometimes its not if the fire is too close to a building?

yes. because that building could catch fire to.

Why do you think you set the fire.

mmm. I just liked setting fires, because I liked the feeling.... for me to get help.

So it was a way of asking for help?

yes

And you said you like the feeling as well?

yes, I liked the feeling because it made me happy. so I feel more happier than when I set it.

Do you remember what was happening in your life before you set the fire?

Well, I was angry and depressed at the way my life was going.

What was good about your life.

I wasn't doing thinks properly. Things weren't going right. I was making mistakes all the time. I wasn't really thinking straight. I wasn't really concentrating, like on what I was doing. I was giving up to easy, I just got angry.

Who were you angry at?

I was angry at myself. because I couldn't do things for myself. I had to rely on other people all the time. After a while I was relying on other people all the time, so I relied on myself. But it didn't get me nowhere at all.

Was there anything good about your life at that time?

Not really no.

How did you start the fire? With match or lighter.

What did it feel like to start it?

Well, it felt good in a way. It felt good. Whereas I might have felt its silly to do fire... probably wont ??????? anyway. But at that time I wasn't realising. but sometimes they don't think like that if ????? light fire. You don't think about other people, they just think about themselves. That was who I was thinking about as well.

What happened after you set the fire?

I felt a lot better.

What did you set fire to?

The last time was .... Hospital, like, it was one of those old buildings, ... one of those places where they do day-care, like work ??????? So I set fire to it. I didn't set fire to it first, it was like this plastic stuff that was inside and it caught, then the whole building went up.

What happened to the people inside the building?

There was nobody in there, the place was deserted and away from the hospital, it was about 100 yards away from the hospital. It was just on its own.

What do you think was good about setting the fire at the time?

It was good because all my anger was in the fire and when the fire exploded, my anger exploded with it. So instead of taking it out on someone else, the fire took it out for me.

So did you stay and watch it?

I stood behind the bush. I was peeking my head out from behind the bush, so I could see it.

What wasn't good about setting the fire?

Well, I was risking people's lives as well. I was risking like.....maybe....probably....... because someone might have been passing through.......and .... smoke and all that ...like...... it might have been kids...

Was that something you thought since the fire or was that something that you thought at the time?

It was something that I had .... I had planned it. I planned it first before I done it. Just to see that there is noone inside. Because I don't like go and set it straight away because there might be someone inside. There might be kids, like you know, playing hide and seek and I wasn't realising. Which there could have been, you know what I mean, but I wouldn't have been the wiser.

What did it feel like planning it.

I don't know really........ I was going out first I was going out and ???????/ map..... so there were 2 areas. See, know what I mean...,.... to see what was the best place to start it. Like, shall I start it in the small room, or shall I start it in the big room.

What did it feel like planning it?

Well, it felt quite good. Felt like .... you know what I mean.....like planning it..... instead of going and doing it.... you plan it first .... you see how risky it is first......... you see how risky it is or not and if it is risky, you leave it. and you come back with another plan, until you get it right. It took me 2 times, it took me 2 or 3 times to get it right. I went back the first time and I think.... this time it might not work. So ?[i had to] try a 3rd time when I sussed it out .... so I decided to go for the bigger building. So I started off with the bigger one, so it would spread more easy. So when It started on the bigger one, the flame would be bigger and it ??????????????????

What was life like for you when you were a child?

What, as a young child? .... well it was quite bad.........quite abusive from me dad. I was quite hyperactive, I was quite giddy when I was younger......I was mucking about ......like....... smashing things up.

Right...... so do you think that you were quite an unhappy child?

Yeah, I was quite unhappy and I was quite sad and angry when I was younger.

You remember being sad and angry?

Yeah, I was sad and angry. At that time I was so young, and I couldn't defend myself because I was so young and I was angry at the way things were going at that time.

Can you tell me a bit about the way things were going?

Well, my old man used to beat me up and that. He used to come back drunk. I used to ask him for money for clothes and that and he wouldn't give it to me. That time it felt like, when I was younger, that I never had a dad that .... to look after me. I always relied on my mum.

did you grow up with your family?

I grew up just with my brothers and sisters and my mum. But at that time I grew up as if I had no father.

Who was in your family?

2 Brothers 3 sisters. I had 4 sisters, but one of them died. she died of choking in her sleep. Chewing gum got caught in her throat. She'd had about 2 .... and she died in her sleep. She was 4, I was 3.

Can you describe your mum, what was she like?

She was quite nice. She was quite friendly, but sometimes she would give me a clip around the earhole.

when?

Not a lot. Now and again when I never went to school She would pull my ears and say 'get to school' [laughs]. Really bad my mum was......... she was giddy .... my mum was like .... she was evil my mum was.

Evil?

You know, shouting and that 'ahh, I told you not to do this stupid thing and you never listen do you'.

I never used to listen to what my mum at all. I never used to listen to my family. I never listed to my mum at all. She said 'stop biting your nails and stop drinking, you know what drink does to you' and all this.

So you remember you mum shouting a lot .... and you said she was quite giddy?

Yeah yeah, I remember one time I didn't go to school and she just got a bucket of water and just chucked it all over me. cold water, ice cold, like ice. I never trusted her after that, because I know that she would do it again, if I didn't get up. that got me thinking. I used to think 'if I don't get up this time, she will do it again.' [laughs] I don't want to risk it.

What about your dad.

Well my dad was an alcoholic. he was like an alcoholic probably before he was even born. Before I was born. He was drinking a lot. He wasn't clothing me. He expected my mum to feed me on the kids money. Like........... my mum used to get money from the pension like..... for us kids.....like........ child benefits. She used to feed us on that. She used to get so much for each child. So she couldn't live on him and feed us and feed him at the same time, because he never gave us no money. So he expected us to feed him out of the kids money. Its like he didn't care. He didn't buy us no clothes, no shoes...... like........our mum used to buy that. She used to buy us good clothes and good shoes.

What do you think your parents' relationship was like together? Did they fight or did they get on?

Mum and dad fought a lot. My dad would argue and beat my mum up and everything. He used to hit her.

What would your mum do, if you did something really well?

She might give me some extra pocket money. She might give me praise and say "keep up the good work". ????????????

What would your dad do if you did something really well?

Him............ he wouldn't give two hoots. He wouldn't care at all. he wouldn't care if I won a medal. He wouldn't care if he found me dead. He wouldn't care at all. Last time when my sister died, he didn't care. Its like nothing ever happened. Like nothing ever happened.

What about when you are upset and sad, What would your mum do?

Sometime she comforts me in her arms. Sometimes I used to go upstairs to my room and lock myself in my room, or in my wardrobe. Because I used to lock myself in the wardrobe sometimes. I used to still do it, but I don't do it anymore.

When you felt sad? y

Yes. I used to lock myself in the hatch, you know in the wardrobe, there's a clip so you can close it from inside

What would your dad do if you were sad?

He wouldn't care.

What would your mum do if you were naughty?

Shed give me a clip round the earhole. She might punish me. She might lock me in my room or not give me pocket me for two weeks. Or ground me. One day she grounded me for a month, but I snuck out of the window. I did nt get far. I was about 5 or 7 I was.

So she'd give you clip round the earhole or ground you?

yeah, shed say "????????????" [laughs].

What about your dad?

He used to beat me with the bloody broomstick. He used to grab me by the hair and sometimes used to pull me across the floor and hit me with an iron pole. He'd hit me on the back and everything. He hit me on the wrist as well and broke my wrist. Vie always wanted to get revenge. At that time I felt like shooting him because I couldn't hack it no more.

how old were you then?

Well I was still very young, about 7 or 8. Or even when I was younger I felt like shooting him. But I couldn't because I didn't want to get done for it. He had a gun as well. Because, even my mum was terrified of him because he might use that gun on my mum.

So your mum was frightened that he might use the gun on her?

Yes, that's what he done. He tried to kill her a few times. He tried to strangle her and everything. Until my older brother butted in and stopped him. See my older brother used to fight him with baseball bats and everything. Horrible he was. See that's my dad, that's what he's like, he doesn't go for men. he always picks on women. He always picks on the weak ones. He never picks on someone his Own age or someone his own weight. He always goes for women all the time.

Maybe one day he's gonna come across this woman yeah, whose gonna [weigh into] him. I hope I'm there to see it as well [laughs]. I hope I'm there to see it. He's got a new girlfriend, a new woman. She must be mad. She must be mad in the head. She was a perfect match. I was there at that time. That was just before he came to England. I saw her. You should have seen her man, she was crazy. She's an alcoholic, he's an alcoholic. He's as bad as she is. She's just as bad as him. The two of them are a perfect match.

What is the best memory of your parents?

Don't know.

Its hard to think of one?

Yeah, there wasn't that many. Because I wasn't really that good.

you weren't good? or they weren't good?

I wasn't that good. Because some times my mum wanted to see the last of me because I would get into too much trouble. and she got fed up with me everyday, bringing the police back to the house and giving the family a bad name. With people looking. Everyday, the police knocking at the door and looking for me and I was getting arrested. I was one of those people, you know, I was getting a bad name. That's why my mum wanted to see the last of me.

What about when you were little, do you have any good memories of your parents then?

Oh, well there was times when my mum paid for when I went on tour, on holiday, with the school to England. My dad wouldn't pay for it so my mum paid for it.

How old were you then?

I was about 12 or 13. That was a special school. That was the best when my mum took me too school. she put me on the bus or drove me there.

What was your worst memory of your parents:? Would that be when your mum dad were fighting?

Yeah, the funniest thing though, I still laugh at it now, was when my old man fell down the stairs. I remember a time as well, I was on one of those chopper bikes. I was sitting on the back of the chopper. My dad had the dog tied to the bike. But the dog went for the car, one of those old Mercedes and my dad was flug of the bike. I was in stitches, I couldn't stop laughing. He fell on his face. He fell in the cow poo. It was all stained. I was loving it [laughing], I was loving it.

What about your brothers and sisters? How do you get on with them?

Well, quite well. I never argue with my brothers and sisters.

What is your best memory of your brothers and sisters?

I don't really have any best memories of your brothers and sisters?

Its difficult to think of best memories?

yes.

What about worst memories. Do you have a worst memory of your brothers and sisters?

sometimes I think my brother is more brainier than I am. But then he's probably jealous because I'm a better footballer than he is. Because he wanted to play football in the family. But it turned out the wrong way round. I was the best and he was the worst.

mmm. So your'e the best footballer.....

but he's the brainiest one of the family.

But you think that he's the brainiest. What does that feel like? Does it feel hard?

yes, because I wanted to be the brainiest as well. Well, I'm still quite brainy because when I went to college, I was one of the brightest students. Because I was doing things for myself and I didn't have to rely on others all the time. I could do them for myself.

Was there anyone else important to you when you were little?

Well, me old granny. I was quite fond of her. I used to see her a lot, I used to visit her every week.

what was she like?

She was quite small. She died about 4 years ago. I was on section in England and couldn't go to the funeral.

when you were young. Did you feel that you could do things as well as other children?

Well there were things that I could do. But it took me a while to learn because I was too slow. Like some people were ahead of me because I was too slow and behind. I was still good at it, but I was too slow.

How did that make you feel?

I felt that one day, I might get a good job and earn a lot of money and they might get a poxy job and earn crap money. I might be out there and I might get a job as a carpenter or a council job or a mechanic and earn good money. Maybe I be a better worker than they are.

So that's what used to go through your head?

yeah, because maybe one thing I might be cleverer than they'll ever be because they weren't as good ????????

What did it actually feel like when you were at school. It sounds like you felt you were behind the others.

There was one time when I was cleverer. I was better at football than anyone in the school was. I was gold medalist and everything at soccer skills.

So you felt really clever at soccer, but at times you felt less clever than other people?

Yes, because there was things that they were good at. when it came to things like badminton, I was no good. But then after a while I was coached by a professional tennis players. They were coaching me how to hit the ball because at first I couldn't hit the ball. I felt gutted .... I felt really stupid. Because they could hit the ball and I was missing the ball all the time. I was getting so angry.

What was it like for things like reading and writing? Was that the same?

No not really, I could easily read and write. I was really good at one time, but I stopped doing it. I can still do a bit but I'm not as good as I used to be. I used to be really neat. But I stopped doing it. Its like when it comes to maths and all that. I forget how to do it half the time.

What sort of school did you go to?

First school I went to was a boy's national school, with all men. If you finished the seventh class, then after that you went straight to college. But I couldn't keep up with the work. I was still quite good, I was still quite brainy, but I was too far behind. Because one day I had to stay back one year because I was too far behind.

how old were you then?

Well, I first started school when I was about 5. Then when I was 6 I started ?[stealing things]???????? then when I was 7 I went into 1st class but then I stayed back a year because ;I couldn't keep up with the work. and I was bad.

you were bad?

Well I wasn't that good at doing my work, like homework and that. I wasn't all that brainy.

What did that feel like?

Well, I felt like I needed someone to teach me. To train me, like how to do A-levels. How I'm going to achieve my CSEs or whatever. Vie got some courses already. Vie got an NVQ that Vie done. Vie got some city and guilds.

do you think you were happy at school?

No, I used to hate school. The only thing I liked about school was sports day.

So you liked sports at school. What didn't you like at school?

I didn't like to do homework because I was getting too much work. Sometimes I didn't do it. But if you didn't do it, they gave you double, and that was worse.

What was it like when you got to the special school?

It was very similar but it was easier. At first it was too easy, but then it got harder. One of the teachers told me what to do but other times they didn't tell you. Because they made it more complicated. But this teacher makes it easier to understand. You know like some people give you advice, but sometimes, they say it in a complicated way so that person

might not understand. If you are in a group and your'e giving someone advice, the best thing to do is to explain it in an easier way, so that they know what you mean.

How did you get on with you teachers?

I got on quite well with them.

Did you ever get into trouble at school?

I used to get cained with the ruler.

what did you get into trouble for?

coming into school late. Smoking. I would sneak into the bathroom and smoke.

How did you feel when you got into trouble.

I didn't really care. I mean, I'm not the only one that done it. We all got 200 lines "I should not smoke in the shower room". I used to hate doing lines. so I didn't do them. The next day when I didn't do them she would give me 400. It would go up to about 2,000 lines. About 2 days later. she forgot. So I kept my mouth shut!

Did you have many friends at school?

Yes, but I was mixing with a bad crowd at school. I was mixing with trouble makers. I had some friends from my first school. But they were bad company. The friends at the new school were all right they lived far away in the country. They were friendlier. I found myself a nice girl there as well. I did didn't like her at first, I thought she was a tart. She looked like a freak. I thought, I'm not going out with you dressed liked that, Id run a mile [laughs].

Were you ever bullied at school?

yes I was once in the first school. I got revenge on them. I went down to their school and bullied a few of them. to see how they like it.

At the first school I used to get bullied there because I was dressed different. Because they were jealous because they were wearing uniform. I told them that I wasn't going to wear it. Because they didn't want to wear it, but they had to wear it. They were gutted. The head master used to ask where is my uniform, but I said , "IM not wearing no uniform". I didn't like the colours they were like, grey and navy. I'M not wearing that".

Were you bullied at the 2nd school?

No I wasn't bullied but I got a few of my mates and, went down to the first school and, the people that were bullying me,............ we bullied them. Because noones ever stood up to these people before, because most people were scared of them at school. Noone's ever stood up to them to see how they like it, to see how the other person feels.

In general would you say that you like being with other people or like being on your own?

sometimes I like to be on my own to think, but sometimes I like a bit of company as well.

Do you have many friends?

Yes yes, I've got more friends than in here I've got a lot of friends, yes I've got quite a lot. I've got the friends that I grew up with. these are the ones that don't get into trouble. The other ones, I don't even bother with no more. I don't talk to them. Id probably still say hello to them, but I don't get involved. I don't hang around with them no more. Maybe go for a drink with them, but I don't get involved with trouble.

Do you think that you would like to have more friends?

Oh yeah, the right ones. Like not getting involved with trouble makers because they might make bad mistakes and you might meet somebody who might be bad company. You don't know what they're like because these people might be nutters, they might kill someone with a gun. They might have done something stupid. That's the trouble with making friends............ like............ knowing who you are making friends with. Its the way they react.

So is that a worry for you.....making friends?

Yes, you don't know who your'e going to be with. you don't know who your'e dealing with . That's the reason that, half the time, I never made friends with nobody. sometimes I used to stick to the friends I knew. It was all right, meeting people in groups, like going to new places. It'll be all right when I go to [future placement], Ill probably meet new people there anyway. But, half the time, the people I live with now, they're dopes and I don't want to hang around with dopies, you know what I mean. These people are all on medication, they might be crazy, they might be psychos, whatever. Just by the look of them. I know the way they act and the way they look and the way that they talk and some people get angry.

Do you find it easy to make friends?

Yeah, now I do. I like to meet new friends but I like to know the person first before I really make friends. Its like girls, you know, get to know them first before you go on a

date, get to know them first. That's what I did with my girlfriend. I built a relationship first before we went out.

It sound like it feels difficult to trust people sometimes?

Yes because I didn't trust her. she might go and see somebody else and that's what I might do as well.

What do you like to do with friends?

Going out, enjoying ourselves, going clubbing, walking out to the park, usual stuff. Gallivanting around.

You told me you had a girlfriend, could you tell me a little bit about her?

Yes, we were just like friends at first. The first time she saw me, she came down the stairs and thought 'he's nice'. I had the same feeling. I thought 'I'M going to chat this one up' I got to know her. I started chatting her up. Started talking to her first. She got to know me. I started to buy her things as well. Like cokes, chocolates, flowers. In about a few weeks, she got to know me. Sometimes we talked about our feelings as well, how we feel about each other. Sometimes she's got very similar feelings as me. She's got the same kind of feeling as well. She got abused as well, by her father. Its like were on the same kind of pattern, on the same kind of line.

so you feel like you have feelings that are similar?

Yes.

Does it feel like the relationship you have had before?

Yes, but there is stuff that she might not know yet. She knows the basics, but when were together, its like trying to learn a future plan. Sit talk and, if she's got any problems, maybe I can help her because, maybe Vie been through the same kind of system. and maybe Vie been like down that road before . Its like problem solving. Like, learning strategies to cope. where to go, how to stop it.

How is your relationship different, to the relationship you had with your girlfriend before?

Like, we know each other first. We have responsibilities for our own reactions. Its the longest relationship Vie ever had with a girl. Its the first time Vie been engaged.

What have your relationships been like before?

Well, sometimes you know, they flirt with someone else or see someone else. I don't like girls flirting with other people. Because, I don't do it to them do I? Well, I did it twice before, but I learned by lesson after that. I ended up losing both didn't I. Because I was kissing and snogging with one and the other one saw me. [laughs].

I'M going to ask you a bit about yourself now. are you happy with your life?

Oh yeah, now.

What do you like?

I quite like, I got more things to do now. I know how to control things. Like if a problem occurs, I know where to, sort of, deal with it.

What don't you like about your life?

I think, the people around me telling you what to do.

Is that something that happens in here or is that something that happens when you are out of here?

Well sometimes, when I'M outside because people come to see me all the time. Like psychologists and doctors. Sometimes, I try to get away from all that. Its like being back inside here again isn't it. Sometimes, I want to forget about all that and just get on with my life.

So you don't like people coming to see you all the time?

Well, I don't mind once in a while. But not every single day. You would end up talking about the same thing all the time.

If you could change one things about your life what would it be?

I would change a lot. I would change my moods. my lifestyle, my attitude. I wouldn't get depressed. I know I don't get depressed anymore. Sometimes, I feel down, but I cope with that, stress and that.

you said you'd change your attitude as well?

Yes, the way I probably act. The way I talk to people.

How would you change that?

Well Id like to speak more politely.

More politely? yes, well, you know, sometimes you might say the wrong thing. You might say something wrong. Because you ve got to think before you say it. Because that's the way I do it. Sometimes if I'M trying to deal with something. I ve got so much on my mind, like so many solutions, that its the way of saying it. Its the way of trying to find the right words.

So sometimes you feel it is hard to find the right words?

Yes.

What do you like most about yourself?

Don't know [laughs]. I like the way I look. I like the way I dress. I don't care about people looking at the way I dress. They're not wearing it. Sometimes I look rough, sometimes I hate shaving but its got to be done.

What don't you like about yourself?

Getting into mischief. Getting back into these places. These situations that I'm in now. discussing histories. It brings back bad memories. It is sometimes hard to remember when I was really young. Like remembering back to the age of one

Do you ever get angry with yourself and want to hurt yourself?

Sometimes yeah. Sometimes I do when I get angry. When I cant do nothing properly. Sometimes, when I try to do something, I get angry. Its like with jigsaw puzzles, which I hate. Its like, this bit goes here and this bit goes there and I get so angry I feel like breaking it.

So if you could change one thing about yourself what would it be?

Not to give up too easy. I have a habit of giving up to easy. I still have it even now. sometimes I do sometimes I don't. Depends how I feel. Its like when I want to Play a chord. Sometimes I get so angry because I play in wrong and I want to play it better than this. Vie got so much things on my mind. Because Vie got plans for my trial and getting my way out. I don't think about nothing else. I'M just working on trying to get out of these places. I'M just trying to ??????? the mistakes that I have done in the past. Sometimes I sit to myself on my own and I go back and I think about my mistakes in the past. And then I listen to music to relax. I want to build on my future and to know where exactly I went wrong, so it wont happen again.

How do you feel most of time?

Sometimes I feel good, sometimes I feel drowsy, Sometimes I feel weird

Weird?

yeah, like sometimes when my whole body feel fucked up and messed up. Its likes being in these places. All the stress of being in these places.

Its stressful.

Yeah, its like being locked in a cage. Its like there's nothing you can do. you cant play ball and games and this and that.

What kinds of things would you like to do?

I don't know, things like interesting discussions or games, but I'M not interested in ball games.

When you set the fire, how did you feel most of the time then.

Mostly angry. Really angry. Why I set the fire was because of what I was going through. The way of coping with my history and with my dad to. I liked the feeling of fires because that was the only way of getting help. Because before I set the fire, noone was listening or paying attention and fire was my way of getting attention. It was my only way.

When you are (5 years time) how would you like things to be?

Id like to be in a house, with a swimming pool in the back and loads of women lying in the swimming pool. and having a girlfriends. Id have one of those fancy beds, you know, the ones with curtains on. Sitting around, doing the lottery. winning the lottery.............

Still, Id like to settle down with a little house and have a pond in the back with fish, with a fence to stop the kids from falling into. Id like to have a kids garden in the back too.

you'd like to be a dad?

mmmm it would probably feel weird the first time. but that day will come when I get out of this place.

how likely do you think these things will be? Well, its got to come. My girlfriends wants it. she wants four kids one day. Bloody hell. I cant think of anything worse. I mean its all right, but sometimes they're really noisy. and they're very expensive...... nappies.....baby food........clothes .... costs a bomb [laughs].

How do you see life being for you when you get out of the unit?

It will be an enormous experience for me. I'll be a father. Looking after kids.

and when you get out of the unit, do you see yourself having children quite soon?

No, Ill settle down first, a place on my own. As soon as a leave here I want my own flat, not shared, my own. I want to live there for a few months and get some money together. Id look for a job in upholstery. I used to do that in Ireland. Either that or work for the council. Well see.