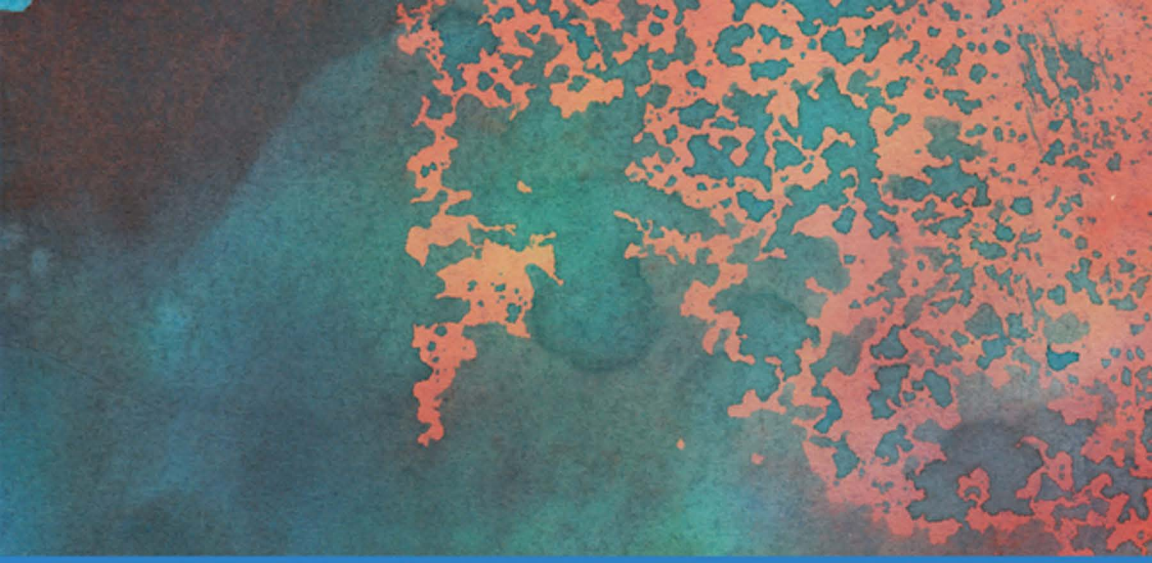
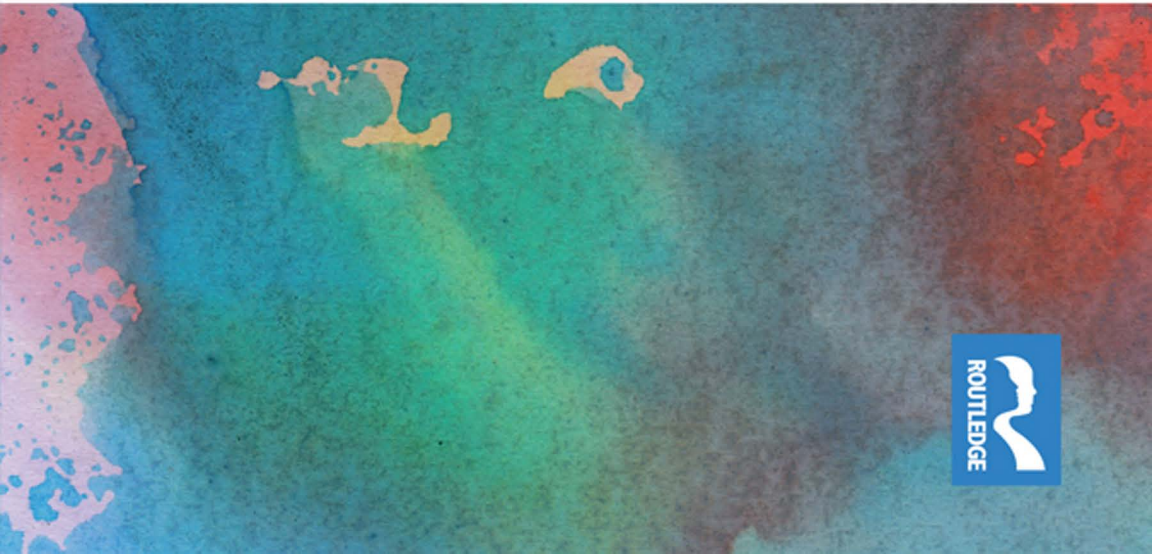


Routledge Studies in Criminal Behaviour

EMPATHY VERSUS OFFENDING, AGGRESSION, AND BULLYING

ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE USING THE BASIC EMPATHY SCALE

Edited by
Darrick Jolliffe and David P. Farrington



Empathy versus Offending, Aggression, and Bullying

Empathy versus Offending, Aggression, and Bullying advances knowledge about the measurement of empathy, using the Basic Empathy Scale (BES), and how empathy is related to offending, aggression, and bullying in community and incarcerated groups.

Empathy is widely accepted as one of the most important individual factors that are related to offending, aggression, and bullying, and it is common in many intervention projects to aim to improve empathy in order to reduce offending, aggression, and bullying. The BES was constructed by Jolliffe and Farrington (2006) and has been widely used in a number of countries. This book brings together chapters, from a broad range of contributors, which explore the application of BES in ten different countries (England, Portugal, Spain, Poland, Italy, the Netherlands, Croatia, Australia, Canada, and the USA). Each chapter reviews the use of the BES in that particular jurisdiction, its psychometric properties, and its importance in relation to offending, aggression, and bullying. The research includes samples from primary schools, secondary schools, and the community, as well as those who are justice-involved and on probation, in prisons and secure psychiatric hospitals. The book concludes with wider implications for intervention, policy, and practice.

This book will be valuable reading for students and scholars of criminology, psychology and sociology, as well as practitioners who are interested in developing their understanding of the complex link between empathy and a range of antisocial behaviours.

Darrick Jolliffe is Professor of Criminology and Head of the School of Law and Criminology at the University of Greenwich. He has published extensively in the areas of empathy, individual differences and offending, developmental life-course criminology, punishment and offending, and has conducted numerous research studies for National and International Government Agencies.

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Empathy versus Offending, Aggression, and Bullying

Advancing Knowledge using the Basic Empathy Scale

Edited by Darrick Jolliffe and David P. Farrington

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Contents

Foreword

Empathy is a psychological concept that mainly involves the experience and understanding of other persons' emotions (e.g. Hogan, 1969). It is a very important characteristic in human life and probably contributed to the success of mankind in the process of evolution. Although great apes and other species also seem to show some kind of empathic behaviour (e.g. Campbell & de Waal, 2014), perspective taking, feeling for others, and thoughts and emotions that match other persons' thoughts and affects are issues that are as important in modern societies as in the early times of *homo sapiens*. For example, empathy or a lack of empathy is a key factor in interpersonal communication, childrearing, healthcare, education in schools, supporting vulnerable people, psychotherapy, intercultural relations, and many other fields.

Low empathy is also an important risk factor for aggression, criminal, and violent behaviour. This is the topic of the present book. Whereas research suggests a plausible basic relation between low empathy and antisocial behaviour, this is not as simple as common sense assumes. The complexity of relations between low empathy and antisocial behaviour is due to various specific features of the two constructs. The chapters in the present volume show these more nuanced relationships and provide not only up-to-date research on the topic, but also data that are helpful for policy and practice in crime prevention and offender treatment.

A key issue of research and practice is the differentiation between various aspects of empathy. Contributions to the present volume use the Basic Empathy Scale (BES; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006). The BES is a widely used self-report questionnaire that measures affective and cognitive empathy as two core dimensions of empathy. Affective empathy indicates emotional resonance and triggers feelings that are similar to those of the other person. According to animal and some human brain research, specific mirror neurons in the ventral premotor cortex and other brain areas may play a role in imitation and empathising with other people's pain (Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004). However, the controversial issue of mirror neurons is only a small part of the expanding brain research on empathy and theory of mind (e.g. Singer, 2006; with regard to violence, see Raine, 2013). Cognitive empathy seems to be primarily attributable to processes in the prefrontal cortex and contains perspective taking with regard to the other person's motives and intentions. For example, cognitive empathy is indicated in learned schemes of

social information processing (Dodge & Pettit, 2003; Lösel, Bliesener, & Bender, 2007) and sometimes it may be strategically used as a camouflage to reach a person's own goals.

Many seriously antisocial individuals and in particular psychopathic offenders have deficits in empathy, even when confronted with scenarios where others suffer from major injuries or pain (Hare & Neumann, 2008). A callous lack of empathy and a shallow affect are 2 of the 20 items of the widely used Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (Hare, 2003). Psychopaths know the words for others' emotions and may superficially exhibit some semantic empathy, but they do not hear the underlying affective "music" (Blair, Richell, Mitchell, & Leonard, 2006). However, the topic of the relation between low empathy and antisocial behaviour goes far beyond the specific cases of psychopathic personality disorder. Accordingly, some contributions to this volume rightly address the psychopathy-empathy relation in a dimensional instead of a taxonomic approach. Although callous-unemotional dispositions may already develop in childhood (Frick, Ray, Thornton, & Kahn, 2014), there are risks of early stigmatisation. A systematic review of studies on callous-unemotional traits shows a large variety of findings (Northam & Dadds, 2020) and the group of callous-unemotional youngsters seem not yet to be as distinct as some research suggests (Lahey, 2014). Numerous prospective longitudinal studies have confirmed a pathway of early starting and relatively persistent antisocial youngsters (Jennings & Reingle, 2012), but there are other trajectories, and group-based growth curves may underestimate the flexibility in individual development (e.g. Stemmler & Lösel, 2015).

Jolliffe and Farrington (2006) have shown that the BES has clear construct validity. Although the two dimensions of cognitive and affective empathy were significantly correlated, confirmatory factor analysis supported the differentiation of both dimensions. This early research also indicated theoretically plausible relations with measures of perspective taking, various personality factors, differences between females and males, socio-economic status, and poor parental supervision. From a methodological viewpoint, it is important that the authors found no significant correlation between a social desirability scale and the BES scores. These findings and the meta-analysis of Jolliffe and Farrington (2004) suggested that the BES is a very useful and relatively easy-to-apply instrument for research on crime, violence, and other aspects of antisocial behaviour.

The present volume contains a broad range of empirical studies that provide recent evidence for both construct and criterion validity of the BES. A foreword should not repeat details of the chapters and the syntheses of the editors. Therefore, I only emphasise the immense breadth of the contents. The chapters contain empathy research from multiple countries, on various forms of crime and violence (including school bullying), different age groups, males and females, early and later phases of antisocial development (including sentenced offenders), official and self-reported delinquency, substance abuse and other health problems, offender treatment, empathy as a mediating factor, and cross-sectional and prospective longitudinal data. Together, these rich data sets underline the usefulness of the BES for assessment, theoretical conceptualisation, and practical application.

It is another strength of this volume that the contributions show both consistencies and some discrepancies between findings. This is in accordance with the recent discussions on problems of replication in psychology, medicine, and criminology (Farrington et al., 2019; Lösel, 2018). Replication does not simply mean carrying out exactly the same studies, but also involves searching for those individual, social, and ecological conditions that contribute to the variation in findings. This is highly important for basic research as well as for applications in prevention and treatment. The present volume contains various examples of both replicated and differentiating findings on the BES. This confirms previous research that, for example, has shown that low affective empathy, but not cognitive empathy, correlated with school bullying when third factors were controlled (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2011). In another study, only low affective but not cognitive empathy was related to self-reported offending (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2007). In both studies, the relation between low empathy and antisocial behaviour was only significant for males and not for females.

This book contains a clear overall validation of the BES and a solid basis for further progress, but the editors rightly emphasise that more research is necessary. In my view, future studies should include more behavioural measures of empathy in addition to questionnaire-based assessments. As we know from research on impulsivity, another important broad construct, correlations with antisocial behaviour are often lower when different data sources are used (Lösel, 2017). A second topic for more research is differentiation of the "targets" of a person's empathy. The BES is a trait-like general measure, but people may exhibit empathy only to specific individuals and not to others. For example, empathy may be a risk factor versus a protective factor, depending on whether it concerns one's own extremist group or an adverse outgroup (Lösel, King, Bender, & Jugl, 2018). Results from animal research point in the same direction (Campbell & de Waal, 2014). A meta-analysis of sex offenders revealed that victim empathy was not a significant predictor of recidivism (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2009), a finding that may be due to specific defence mechanisms in this group of offenders. A third promising topic of future research is the mediating or moderating role of empathy in developmental prevention and intervention. The present volume contains various findings on these issues. Although prevention programme evaluations show significantly desirable effects on aggression, crime, and delinquency (e.g. Beelmann & Lösel, 2020; Farrington, Gaffney, Lösel, & Ttofi, 2017), even sound experimental outcome evaluations rarely investigate mediating intra-individual change processes in empathy. More knowledge on mediating and moderating effects of empathy would help to increase programme effectiveness.

In sum, the book is a comprehensive compendium of recent international research on the relation between dimensions of empathy and various forms of antisocial behaviour. It addresses numerous basic and applied issues and I strongly recommend it for practitioners, researchers, and students.

Friedrich Lösel

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Figures

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Preface

The basic empathy scale (BES) was developed in 2006 by Darrick Jolliffe and David P. Farrington as a method of measuring the two components of empathy, namely affective empathy, or the ability to experience the emotions of others, and cognitive empathy, or the ability to accurately understand the emotions of others. Since that time, the BES has been extensively used in English-speaking countries, and it has also been translated and used to assess empathy around the world.

In October 2018, national and international scholars who had used the BES in research studies to measure empathy in relation to different forms of criminal offending, aggression, and bullying were invited to a conference at the historic Old Royal Naval College at the University of Greenwich. Each scholar presented their paper, and the relationships between empathy and these forms of antisocial behaviour were critically discussed. These papers and the subsequent discussions form the basis of the chapters of this book. The presenters are shown in the two photographs.

This book contains a comprehensive collection of empirical research studies from the UK, Canada, the United States, Italy, Australia, Italy, Spain, Poland, Portugal, and Croatia, all of which critically examine the relationship between empathy – measured using the basic empathy scale – and offending, aggression, and bullying. The research includes samples from primary schools, secondary schools, and the community, as well as those who are justice-involved and on probation, in prisons, and secure psychiatric hospitals. Wide-ranging types of antisocial behaviour are studied, ranging from the bullying behaviour of those serving sentences in Croatian prisons to aggression by Australian students attending university. Each chapter makes a unique contribution to knowledge about the potential involvement of affective and/or cognitive empathy in explaining these behaviours.

Darrick Jolliffe, University of Greenwich
David P. Farrington, Cambridge University

First photo Presenters on the first day (from left to right): Izabela Zych, Noelia Sánchez-Pérez, Jeffrey A. Walsh, David P. Farrington, Darrick Jolliffe, Miguel Basto-Pereira, Henriette Bergstrom, Anna Costanza Baldry, Tara Renae McGee, and Ivana Sekol.

Second photo Presenters on the second day (from left to right): Christopher J. Koegl, Pedro Pechorro, Darrick Jolliffe, Stella Compton-Dickinson, Peer van der Helm, Geert Jan Stams, and Evelyn Heynen.

1 Measuring empathy using the Basic Empathy Scale

Darrick Jolliffe and David P. Farrington

Introduction

The main aim of this book is to examine the relationship between empathy, as measured by the Basic Empathy Scale, and offending, aggression, and bullying. The term empathy was first introduced to the English-speaking world by Edward Titchener in his 1909 publication 'Lectures of the Experimental Psychology and Thought'. Titchener had translated the term "empathy" from the German word "einfühlung", meaning "to feel into", which was a concept that had been widely used in studying aesthetics and emotional responses to art by scholars such as Theodore Lipps (1897). Titchener's doctoral training at the University of Leipzig, with Wilhelm Wundt – a pioneering introspective psychologist – as his supervisor, surely influenced Titchener's conceptualisation of empathy as a personal introspective process about humanising objects, or of reading or "feeling oneself" into them. This interpretation maintained a close conceptual tie with empathy's origins as a trait or ability related to experiencing perspectives and emotions elicited by inanimate objects, particularly artistic ones.

One of the first to propose that it might be useful to apply empathy to living people (and the first to use the term "empathise") was the Harvard neuropsychologist Southard (1919). In Southard's seminal publication, he specifically called for research into 'the extent to which we can read ourselves into the frankly insane or psychopathic' (p. 206), while also setting out 13 questions about empathy that psychiatrists might ask themselves about their patients. These included "items" such as 'How far can you read or feel yourself into the patient?' and, in reference to the patient's behaviour, 'Is this just what a child would do?'. For the latter point Southard argued that, if the psychiatrist felt that the behaviour was 'what a child would do', then the empathic "test" was positive, because each of us readily empathises with a child. While clearly not a psychometric measure of empathy, this is the first reference in the literature attempting to "test" or measure empathy.

In addition to Southard's "Empathy Index", his 1919 work made reference to a number of important issues about empathy. For example, he suggested that differences existed between individuals in their ability to read themselves into others (i.e. empathy as an individual difference), and also noted that this difference was

related to one's power of imagination. Southard also distinguished between empathy that was emotional and that which had intellectual components, while also drawing a clear distinction between empathy and sympathy. To his mind, sympathy had additional value judgements and "superiority" attached, which was not present in empathy. Empirical research over the last 100 years has subsequently provided support for many of Southard's prescient assertions.

There is no universally agreed definition of empathy, but most definitions that have been proffered make reference to either the emotional component of empathy, where one actually experiences the emotions of another person (e.g. Mehrabian & Epstein, 1972), or the intellectual or cognitive component of empathy, where one understands the emotions of another (e.g. Hogan, 1969). More recent definitions, by Davis (1983) and Cohen and Strayer (1996), explicitly define empathy as including both these affective responses and these cognitive abilities.

Empathy and antisocial behaviour

With this conceptualisation, and indeed the origins of empathy as "feeling into", it is perhaps not surprising that empathy, or more precisely a lack of empathy, is often cited as an explanation for antisocial, aggressive and criminal behaviour. Individuals who have lower levels of empathy are theorised to be more likely to act antisocially and commit offences because they are unburdened by the experience or knowledge of the emotional consequences of their actions on others. That is, the negative emotions elicited in others (or anticipated to be elicited), such as fear, distress, and sadness, as a result of one's antisocial behaviour are not factored in advance as a possible cost or consequence of the antisocial act amongst those with low empathy. Thus, people with relatively low levels of empathy are missing a key "emergency handbrake" to moderate their behaviour. A number of more detailed models of the relationship between empathy and antisocial behaviour exist (e.g. Hanson, 2003; Hoffman, 1987), but in essence these models all have the same overall formula: low empathy increases the likelihood of committing criminal offences.

The concept of empathy has also found its way into influential theories of crime, such as Gottfredson and Hirschi's General Theory of Crime (1990, pp. 89–90). A "lack of empathy" is a key, and possibly the, defining characteristic of the concept of psychopathy, which is a well-known constellation of psychological and behavioural traits associated with serious and violent offending (e.g. Blair, 2007; Hare, 1999). Arguably, of more practical importance, a lack of empathy is very often a key intervention target for psychological interventions delivered to offenders, particularly violent and sexual offenders, that are designed to reduce the likelihood of later reoffending (e.g. Mulloy, Smiley, & Mawson, 1991; Ward & Durrant, 2013).

Given the importance of empathy as a potential risk factor for offending, it is essential to have tools to measure this latent construct, and the Basic Empathy Scale (BES) developed by Jolliffe and Farrington (2006) has proven to be one

of the most widely used and researched scales in the world. The items of the BES were specifically designed to address the limitations of previous measures of empathy which tended to measure sympathy (i.e. the extent to which one feels badly for another in an unfortunate situation), as opposed to affective empathy (i.e. the extent to which one shares the emotions of another), and general perspective taking (i.e. the ability to see another's point of view), as opposed to cognitive empathy (i.e. the ability to understand another's emotions).

A total of 40 items, which measured affective and cognitive empathy, were developed and these items were administered to 363 adolescents (194 males, 169 females, aged about 15). From this, exploratory factor analysis identified two cogent factors, one measuring affective empathy (11 items, e.g. 'I usually feel calm when other people are scared' – disagree), and one measuring cognitive empathy (9 items, e.g. 'It is hard for me to understand when my friends are sad' – disagree). This scale was then administered to an additional 357 adolescents along with a series of other measures to evaluate its convergent and divergent validity.

This book

The purpose of this book is to present new research on empathy, measured using the BES, and its relationship to offending, aggression, and bullying. Most of the chapters are revised and updated versions of papers given at a symposium titled 'Measuring Empathy and Behavioural Outcomes: Advancing Knowledge with the Basic Empathy Scale', held at the University of Greenwich's historic Old Royal Naval College in October 2018.

In Chapter 2, Miguel Basto-Pereira and David P. Farrington describe the importance of having a theoretically and psychometrically solid measure of empathy, and the development of the BES. These authors then chart the use of this measure across the world and assess the psychometric properties of this scale as a result of this extensive research. In their review of the literature on the BES, these authors draw attention to some key strengths of this measure, but also to some key issues that require additional research.

In Chapter 3, Evelyn Heynen and colleagues undertake a comprehensive review of the literature to identify research studies which examine the association between parental empathy and the quality of the parent-child attachment. Theoretically, parents with higher levels of empathy would be expected to be more attuned to the emotional experiences of their children, thus facilitating a stronger and more emotionally warm relationship between parents and children. Two of the five studies that were identified used versions of the BES to measure parental empathy. The results point to the potential importance of parental empathy for the strength of the relationship between parents and children.

In Chapter 4, Evelyn Heynen and colleagues use a similar systematic approach to search the literature to identify primary research studies which examined the relationship between parenting styles (i.e. authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting) and the empathy of youth. The authors were able to identify 14 studies which assessed both parenting styles and the empathy of

their children (age from 10 to 20), measured in various ways including questionnaires and observations. The results of this study reveal an important relationship between certain forms of parenting and the level of empathy in youth, but also note that the estimate of the magnitude of these relationships varies depending on a number of factors.

In Chapter 5, Peer van der Helm presents a theoretical model of the potential link between low empathy and aggression and, further, discusses the importance of understanding the development of empathy in young people. van der Helm also explores the evidence which highlights the interactions between certain biological, psychological, and social risk factors and how these can negatively impact on the healthy development of empathy. This chapter concludes with an empirically informed integrated bio-psycho-social model linking adverse childhood experiences through cognitive, socio-emotional, and personality development to aggression.

Farrington and Jolliffe, in Chapter 6, examine the relationship between low empathy, measured using the BES, and both self-reported and official offending by a large sample of males and females (aged about 25) in England. This study is one of very few that have examined the relationship between empathy and offending in a community sample, as opposed to a case-control study in which the empathy level of "offenders" and a comparison group are compared. The results show that low empathy and offending are linked, but somewhat counterintuitively, that the relationship between low empathy and both self-reported and official offending was much more straightforward for females as opposed to males.

In Chapter 7, Jolliffe and Farrington use the BES to measure the cognitive and affective empathy of 299 men (aged about 32) serving a community sentence for a criminal offence in England, and compare these measures to both past offending and later reoffending. Interestingly, the results show that low empathy was associated with serious current and past offending, such as having an index offence of serious theft or having previous convictions for serious violence. The results were far less consistent when low empathy was compared to later measures of reoffending. The authors present a number of potential explanations for this unexpected finding.

The relationship between psychopathy, a constellation of psychological and behavioural traits associated with serious offending, and empathy is explored in Chapter 8 by Bergstrom, Jolliffe, and Farrington. This study uses a community sample of males and females aged about 25 years and assesses their levels of psychopathy using the PCL:SV (Hart, Cox, & Hare, 1995) and their levels of empathy using the BES. The results show that the level of psychopathy in this sample was relatively low, which would be expected in a community sample, but there is also an indication that certain dimensions of psychopathy are related to lower levels of empathy.

Chapter 9 examines the correlates of empathy amongst a sample of incarcerated young males and females in Portugal. Pedro Pechorro and colleagues use the BES and identify significant gender differences in the levels of affective and cognitive empathy in their sample. They also show that the profile of the correlates between

low empathy and a number of related factors shows similarities for incarcerated young males and females, but also a range of important differences, particularly related to social anxiety. The authors reflect on how these gender differences might be usefully incorporated into gender-sensitive interventions.

The BES has also been used to assess empathy in a prison in Canada, as described by Christopher Koegl in Chapter 10. This study is one of the first to examine changes in the BES as a result of a therapeutic ethos or intervention, and the first to compare these changes in empathy to later reoffending. The results highlight the importance that empathy development may have for reducing reoffending, particularly for certain types of offenders.

In England and Wales, those who commit serious offences and are suffering from mental illness are held in secure psychiatric facilities. In Chapter 11, Compton-Dickinson and Jolliffe describe a study in which the BES was used to evaluate the impact of a unique form of music therapy delivered to adult males serving a sentence in a high-security psychiatric hospital. The results provide some evidence of empathy development over time for those who receive music therapy, and also for those for those who receive more typical therapeutic support. The benefits of music therapy for the empathy development for this challenging population are critically discussed.

Chapter 12 presents the results of a study in which a modified version of the BES, based on parental reports of a child's empathy, is compared to both parental reports of the child's negative emotionality and teacher-reported aggression in Spain. Noelia Sánchez-Pérez and colleagues' study of Spanish school children illustrates the importance that empathy may have in explaining the prevalence of school-based aggression. In addition, the results of more in-depth analyses point to the importance that certain factors may have in moderating the relationship between empathy and school-based aggression.

In Chapter 13, McGee and colleagues examine the relationship between three types of aggression (relational, online, and physical) and low affective and cognitive empathy, as well as other potentially important correlates such as low self-control and low social intelligence, in a large sample of Australian university students. The results highlight gender differences in both levels of aggression and also levels of empathy, while also indicating that the strength of association between low empathy and aggression may be different for different types of aggression and also levels of self-control.

Izabela Zych and colleagues report on a comprehensive investigation of the factor structure of the BES and its association to bullying, cyberbullying, and aggression, using a large sample of young people in Poland and an equally large sample in Spain. The results indicate that a modified version of the BES appears to fit the data much better than the original structure, and this modified version of the BES has important relationships with a number of forms of bullying and antisocial behaviour for both males and females.

School bullying, and the relatively new form of cyberbullying, are also the topic of Chapter 15, in which Anna Sorrentino and colleagues administer the BES to Italian school children, along with other relevant measures, one year apart.

The results suggest that there may be important gender differences in the level of empathy, in the most common forms of cyberbullying, and in how empathy changes over time. This chapter closes with a discussion of the implication of these findings for interventions designed to reduce cyberbullying in schoolchildren.

In Chapter 15, Jeffrey Walsh and colleagues examine the relationship between affective and cognitive empathy, and also narcissism, and compare these with US university students' retrospective experiences of bullying victimisation in high school. The findings indicate that those who report being a victim of bullying have a unique profile of both narcissism and empathy which is different from both those who report bullying others and those not involved. The implications of a lack of "healthy narcissism" and elevations in affective empathy in victims is used to frame the development of interventions designed to reduce victimisation.

Bullying and its causes and correlates have been studied not only in school settings, but also in prisons. In Chapter 17, Ivana Sekol and colleagues examine the relationship between affective and cognitive empathy using the BES and the prevalence of different types of bullying in five Croatian prisons. The results again show that females have higher cognitive and affective empathy than males. Interestingly, female and male bullies appear to differ in their most common forms of bullying, and female and male bullies also appear to have different empathy profiles. Based on more comprehensive analyses, this chapter calls into question the relative importance of empathy in explaining bullying in prison.

In the final chapter, Jolliffe and Farrington reflect on the benefits and limitations of the BES as a measure of empathy. In addition, the key findings of the previous chapters are used to highlight the current state of knowledge of the relationship between empathy, antisocial behaviour, bullying, and offending. The authors use this platform to examine the potential usefulness of interventions designed to increase empathy to reduce antisocial behaviour, bullying, and offending, and propose a research agenda which would help to clearly establish the causal relationship, and therefore likely effectiveness of interventions which aim to increase empathy.

Overall, this collection provides a comprehensive and state-of-the-art view of the study of empathy in the Western world.

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