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Introduction

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Research and practice in forensic psychology involves a wide range of activities within secure and community settings. Secure settings include Her Majesty's Prison Service, private prisons, Local Authority homes for young people and secure units for adult and young offenders with mental health issues and/or personality disorders run by the National Health Service (NHS) or private organizations. Furthermore, there are similar secure services offered to adults or young people with intellectual disabilities who are also deemed to be a danger to themselves or others. Community settings involve psychologists working with the police, social services, youth offending services, and community health services, especially in the areas of violence in the community, domestic violence, child abandonment, abuse, and neglect.

The aim of psychological interventions in forensic settings is to reduce the possibility of harmful behavior directed toward self or others or that threatens the rights and safety of adults and children. This involves the prevention of violent and antisocial behavior and helps with the detection and identification of those perpetrators who have already committed a violent or antisocial offense. These activities are usually carried out in community settings.

Forensic psychologists working in secure settings are usually working with people who have already committed an act of violence and/or antisocial behavior. The aim of their work is to assess the factors that led to their index offense and ameliorate or reduce the chances of the same behavior being repeated within the secure setting or after release. Risk factors associated with violent and antisocial

acts include mental health problems, addiction and substance misuse, intellectual disabilities, personality disorders, and adverse experiences in childhood.

Hence, one of the most frequent activities of a forensic psychologist, in both community and secure settings, is to carry out “psychological assessments” in relation to the risk of violent and antisocial behavior (including acquisitive crime) and the formulation of criminogenic needs that direct interventions in terms of treatment and rehabilitation. The formulation balances the assessment of dynamic risk and background static risk factors, with protective factors that may help prevent people in conflict with the law from reoffending.

Furthermore, forensic psychologists advise law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system on behavioral assessment in the investigation of offenders, eyewitness testimony, psychological influences on jury decision-making, and the preparation of vulnerable children and adults in court.

Similar to clinical psychologists, forensic psychologists must be proficient and competent in skills such as clinical/forensic assessment, interviewing and observation, written and verbal communication, and psychological report writing. Often, they are invited as expert witnesses into court and/or to make case presentations informing courts about an offender’s ability to stand trial, about Parole Board hearings, and about the multidisciplinary teams who are making decisions about the future placement of offenders.

With respect to victims of crime, forensic psychologists are involved in the assessment of re-victimization and victim support, child custody evaluations, parenting assessments, counseling services to victims, and the assessment of post-traumatic stress disorder and its relation to the victim to offender concept.

The criminal justice system and the professionals, policymakers, politicians, and the general public often see offenders and victims as a strict dichotomy, that is a person is either a victim or an offender. However, in reality, the distinction is blurred if current and life histories are taken into account. In fact, the majority of offenders have been previously victimized and a significant proportion of victims later develop behavior harmful to themselves or to others. This can be within their family environment only or it can be within the family and the community.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book contains four sections, covering the assessment of various client groups in different legal and professional contexts.

Part One covers psychological and risk assessment in investigations and in the criminal justice system:

Risk assessment and formulation

Violent offenders and murderers

Sexual offenders
Firesetters
Parole assessments
Behavioral assessment in investigative psychology.

Part Two focuses on the assessment of clients in mental health and specialist health services:

Assessing risk of violence in mentally disordered offenders
Assessing mental capacity in offenders with intellectual and developmental disabilities
Offenders with personality disorders
Offenders and substance abuse.

Part Three covers the assessment of violence in the family and the community and its relevance to prevention:

Community approaches to the assessment and prevention of intimate partner violence and child maltreatment
Parental assessments in childcare proceedings
Perpetrators of domestic violence.

Part Four engages readers in discussions on policies and practice issues in forensic assessment:

Assessment of hostage situations and their perpetrators
Assessing the sexually abused child as a witness
Working with young offenders
Ethics of risk assessment.

