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Demographics as a factor predicting public punitiveness

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Demographics as a Factor Predicting Public Punitiveness

I Introduction

- Public punitiveness refers to a level of unrest within society which demands that the courts deal out harsher sentences for convicted offenders (Hough et al. 2013)
- Cross-culturally, public opinions of the courts and the sentences that they distribute are seen to be too lenient (Allen et al. 2005, in the UK; Pastore and Maguire 2003, in the US)
- It has consistently been found by researchers including Gelb (2011) and Roberts and Indermaur (2007) that those with higher levels of education have lower levels of punitiveness
- Findings related to age as a factor are less consistent, Hough and Moxon (1985) are among the researchers who have found evidence to suggest that older people have higher levels of punitiveness
- Men have generally been found to be more punitive than women. However, there is some debate about this and differences between sexes have been found to be greater in more specific cases such as for juvenile offenders

II Hypotheses

A review of the literature allowed for the following hypotheses to be made:

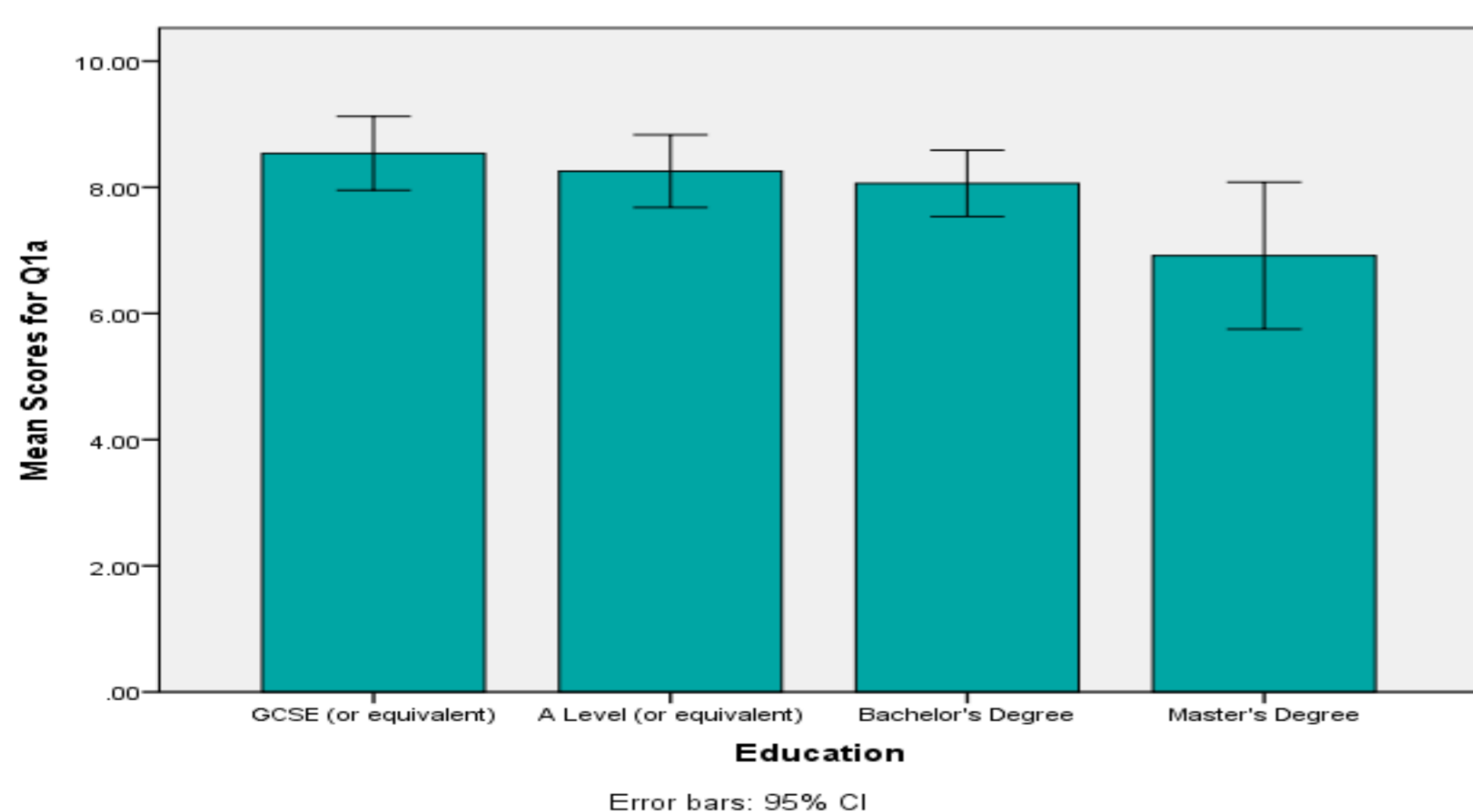
- H₁: For education, having a lower level of education will be a significant predictor of high punitive attitudes
- H₂: For age, being older will be a significant predictor of high punitive attitudes
- H₃: For sex, being male will be a significant predictor of high punitive attitudes

IV Results

A three-way MANOVA was conducted on the 'rationales for sentencing' question which highlighted both effects of individual IV's and interaction effects between them. The most significant finding from this analysis was the interaction between age and level of education for the DV 'the rationale for sentencing is reparation', ($F(14,64) = 2.98^{***}$). Although several other combinations of factors also produced significant results at $p < .05$, level of education was the only independent factor to produce significant results by itself.

VI Figure 2

Mean Scores Measuring Punitiveness



VII Discussion

- The results from this study relating to level of education mirrored those found in the literature. Although significant results were found in relation to age as a factor, the relationship was found to be in the opposite direction to the findings in the literature
- Only the experimental hypothesis relating to level of education was able to be accepted
- The vignettes showed that no sex differences were present and it was also noted that responses were generally in line with the sentencing guidelines in England and Wales (Sentencing Guidelines Council, 2008)
- Implications of research into levels of public punitiveness can reach as far as government policy as demonstrated by Clear and Cole (2001, cited in Payne et al. 2004). As studies similar to this one are often consulted by political figures in order to gauge opinions and satisfaction, and this can help them to amend policies in order to win public confidence
- It would be beneficial for future research to focus not only on which factors predict punitiveness but also how to change attitudes and also why particular factors influence views

III Method

A survey methodology was used in this study; along with the key demographic information (age, level of education and sex) the study also collected attitudes of participants toward different aspects of sentencing and therefore their level of punitiveness.

This questionnaire was adapted from a larger study conducted by Hough et al. (2009). A total of 107 participants took part (63 females, 44 males). The sections included questions asking about rationales for sentencing, personal circumstances which could result in a more lenient sentence and several vignettes where the participants gave what they believed to be appropriate sentences to hypothetical offenders.

V Figure 1

MANOVA Table for Rationales of Sentencing

Source	Dependent Variable/ Rationale	SS	d.f.	Mean Square	F
Education	Punishment	25.43	3	8.48	2.76*
	Rehabilitation	19.05	3	6.35	2.81*
	Deterrence	23.11	3	7.70	3.83*
Age*Education	Reparation	106.81	14	7.63	2.98***
	Deterrence	56.96	14	4.07	2.02*
Sex*Education	Reparation	21.75	3	7.25	2.84*
Age*Sex*Education	Reparation	45.06	7	6.44	2.52*
Error	Punishment	196.44	64	3.07	
	Rehabilitation	144.85	64	2.26	
	Reparation	163.62	64	2.56	
	Deterrence	128.79	64	2.01	
Corrected Total	Punishment	310.52	102		
	Rehabilitation	249.44	102		
	Reparation	389.38	102		
	Deterrence	245.20	102		



VIII - References

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