CHAPTER 11

Crime and Criminality

Crime and Criminality scales encompass two very different kinds of research instruments. The first types of scales are the criminality instruments. These scales measure the degree to which people see certain acts as criminal, either in terms of their values and beliefs, or in terms of their actual behaviors. The Criminal Attitude Scale falls within this definition and was developed to measure peoples' degrees of criminality. These scales also attend to criminality as a phenomenon, as reflected in the Attitude toward the Prevalence of Stealing Scale.

We note that some scales that are called criminality measures are included in the Offenders chapter, while others of similar titles are reviewed here. The distinction between them is made on the basis of the actual object of study. If the object was people involved in criminal acts, the scale was put in the Offenders chapter. If the object was criminality as a phenomenon or construct, then the scale was placed in this chapter. One scale, the Maladaptive Behavior Record, overlaps the categories of people and constructs, and appears here.

Criminality seriousness instruments all seek to evaluate the severity of a variety of adult offenses. (Some juvenile severity measures have been discussed in the Delinquency chapter.) Seriousness measures have assumed increasing importance as researchers look toward sophisticated and multifaceted criteria for crime prevention programs. Seriousness assessment, however, has become an extensive, often complex, body of knowledge that is well outside the scope of the present handbook. A few seriousness measures are listed in this chapter so that references are available for the interested reader.

The second category of scales deals with aggression and hostility. These concepts apply to members of the general public, to persons who are successful, law-abiding citizens, and to normal interchanges between human beings. Yet the theoretical constructs of aggression, hostility, and violence have special relevance to criminal assaults and law violations. For this reason they are included here.
CRIME AND CRIMINALITY ATTITUDE SCALES: REVIEWS

Aggression-Altruism Scale

Development and Characteristics

The Aggression-Altruism Scale (AAS) was constructed to measure “hurting-helping” attitudes (Larsen, 1971). It assumes that attitudes of aggression and altruism form a continuum, and that such attitudes predispose individuals to behave in a certain manner. Therefore, a measure of one’s position on this continuum should predict whether he or she is likely to behave aggressively or altruistically.

This scale was not specifically developed for use in criminal justice. Aggression toward people, however, is a major reason for incarceration and since the possibility of further aggressive acts is a major factor in parole decision making, the ability to predict such actions is relevant.

The Thurstone equal-appearing intervals method of scale construction was followed. Items for the original pool were selected by searching other scales for statements with aggressive content. These items and 33 items written by the author reflecting intensity of preference to hurt or help the attitudinal object completed a pool of 160 statements.

Fourteen senior and graduate students taking a seminar in attitude methodology judged each item as to the “direction and intensity with which it expressed intent of hurting or helping” (Larsen, 1971, p. 275). Thirty-seven of the items showed variability small enough (expressed as a $Q$ value) to merit use in the final scale. Form A consisted of 20 of these items, and Form B was assigned the remaining 17 items.

Response Mode

The respondent is asked to read the items and note whether he or she agrees or disagrees with each statement.

Scoring

As with most scales constructed in this manner, each statement is weighted according to its ranked position of intensity of the attitude under consideration. In this case, only the weight for an affirmative response is given. Therefore, a total score is, apparently, obtained by summing the weights of those items checked “I agree.”