

Analyzing the Influence of Cognitive Distortions on the Formation of Criminal Behavior: A Systematic Review of Theories and Recent Research

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Abstract

The phenomenon of cognitive distortions in criminal behavior is increasingly gaining attention in the fields of forensic psychology and criminology. Cognitive distortions refer to irrational or deviant thought patterns that lead individuals to misinterpret reality in a way that justifies or rationalizes their behavior, including criminal acts. In the context of crime, cognitive distortions often serve as a justification mechanism, enabling offenders to perceive their criminal actions as acceptable or even warranted, despite contradicting societal norms. This study systematically reviews the role of cognitive distortions in criminal behavior, emphasizing the types of distortions, causal relationships, and implications for interventions. A systematic literature review (SLR) method is employed, synthesizing empirical studies and theories on cognitive distortions in offenders. The findings show consistent evidence that cognitive distortions such as self-serving biases and victim-blaming are associated with externalizing behaviors and criminal activity. Additionally, cultural and methodological gaps in the current research are identified, suggesting the need for longitudinal studies and cross-cultural comparisons. This research highlights the importance of early interventions targeting cognitive distortions to prevent criminal behavior, particularly in high-risk groups like adolescents.

Keywords : cognitive distortions, criminal behavior, psychological intervention, adolescents, forensic psychology

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BACKGROUND

The phenomenon of *cognitive distortion* in the context of criminal behavior is one of the topics that is receiving increasing attention in various disciplines, especially in forensic psychology and criminology. *Cognitive distortion* refers to an irrational or distorted way of thinking that causes individuals to interpret reality in a way that is incorrect, thereby supporting or justifying their behavior (Polusny & Follette, 1995). In the context of crime, *cognitive distortion* often serves as a justification mechanism that allows the perpetrator to perceive criminal behavior as something acceptable or even justified, even if it is contrary to prevailing social norms. Research on *cognitive distortion* opens up new insights into why some individuals are able to commit actions that are contrary to law and ethics without feeling guilty (Townesley, 2024).

In Indonesia, this phenomenon of *cognitive distortion* is increasingly relevant along with the increase in cases of violence, such as sexual violence and domestic violence (Marcopulos, 2024). Based on data from Polusny and Follette (1995) the number of violence against women has continued to increase in recent years, with many cases involving sexual harassment, violence in intimate relationships, as well as violence occurring in the domestic environment. The phenomenon of *cognitive distortion* is an important part of the effort to understand how perpetrators of violence can reduce individual guilt and consider individual actions as normal (Chen dkk., 2023). In many cases, this *cognitive distortion* does not only occur in individuals who are already involved in the criminal world, but also in individuals who have the potential to commit crimes, especially adolescents who are in the process of finding their identity (Townesley, 2024).



Research conducted by revealed that Ceccato (2024) *cognitive distortion* has a significant role in criminal behavior, especially in terms of decreased guilt and reduced empathy for victims. In this study, distortions such as minimization and *blaming the victim* were found that are often used by the perpetrator of the crime to reduce individual guilt and blame the victim for what happened. These distortions suggest that these cognitive phenomena not only affect individual behavior personally, but also have broader social impacts, impacting people's perceptions of criminal acts (Yoder, 2024).

The study, which is a meta-analysis of various previous studies, confirms that Brugman dkk. (2024) *cognitive distortion* has a strong association with external behaviors such as aggression, delinquency, and other high-risk behaviors. The results of this study show that *cognitive distortion* is not only related to individuals who have engaged in criminal behavior, but also individuals who have a tendency to engage in high-risk behaviors, such as violent or destructive behavior (Agnihotri, 2023). Research shows that Tanigör (2025) *cognitive distortion* has a significant association with various types of maladaptive behavior in adolescents, including aggressive behavior, delinquency, and antisocial behavior (Oğuztüzün, 2023). *Certain cognitive distortions* are stronger in relation to certain types of behavior. This highlights the importance of a deeper understanding of how (Oğuztüzün, 2023) *cognitive distortion* develops, especially in adolescence which is a period of self-identity formation (Babcock, 2024).

Self-serving distortion, which is often found in adolescents who engage in antisocial behavior, serves to defend oneself or reduce guilt (Wani, 2024). This distortion motivates adolescents to continue to engage in negative behaviors on the grounds that the individual is not responsible for the individual's actions or that the individual is only acting in reaction to a situation that the individual considers unfair (Wani & Ahmed, 2024).

Research shows that Holt dkk. (2010) *cognitive distortion* plays a role in the formation of the mindset of sexual offenders. Sex offenders often use *cognitive distortions* such as moral justification and minimization to reduce moral dissonance and justify individual actions (Rana et al., 2024). The process of justification occurs in the mind of the perpetrator and how this affects the individual's decision to commit the crime (Arias dkk., 2013). With this understanding, more targeted intervention strategies can be developed to reduce the occurrence of sexual crimes (Briere & Runtz, 1993).

In studies conducted by individuals, various Raposo (2023) *cognitive distortions* were identified used by child abusers to justify individual actions. Distortions such as minimization, which perceive sexual behavior toward children as harmless, as well as defining the victim as the party who consents to the act, provide an understanding of how *cognitive distortion* is used to deceive oneself and reduce guilt. These findings suggest that (Schneider & Wright, 2004) *cognitive distortion* in the context of sexual crimes is particularly strong and needs to be addressed with a rehabilitative approach based on a deeper psychological understanding (Gallupe dkk., 2019). Research conducted Bourke dan Hernandez (2009) in Japan corroborates these findings by showing that perpetrators of sexual violence against women also exhibit *pattern of cognitive distortion* similar to perpetrators of sexual crimes in Western countries. Nonetheless, individuals also find the presence of cultural nuances that influence the way such justifications are expressed (Brantingham, 2013). These findings highlight the importance of understanding cultural context in designing more effective and targeted intervention strategies, as *cognitive distortion* can vary depending on cultural background (Amissah & Nyarko, 2017).

In studies conducted by Geer dkk. (2000) individuals, they examined whether psychosocial factors such as optimism, *self-compassion*, altruism, and gratitude could mediate the relationship between *cognitive distortion* and the ability to forgive. The results of the study suggest that these psychosocial factors can help individuals to overcome *cognitive distortion* and improve the individual's ability to forgive (Ward & Beech, 2006). These interventional approaches involving psychosocial factors pave the way for a more positive and promotive approach to prevention and rehabilitation, rather than focusing solely on behavior correction (Fisher et al., 1999).

Research conducted by the Associated Press on the Effect of Unemployment on Uzun dan Karataş (2023) *Cognitive Distortion* also provides important insights. Individuals point out that unemployed conditions can increase stress and potential involvement in risky behaviors, including criminal behavior (Wallinius et al., 2011). This highlights the importance of a more holistic social intervention that looks not only at criminal behaviour from the perspective of the individual, but also from the perspective of existing social and economic structures. By understanding these factors, a more comprehensive approach can be developed to address the problem of crime (Barriga et al., 2000).

The urgency of research on *cognitive distortion* becomes even clearer when we realize that crime problems are not only related to individual factors, but are also influenced by social, cultural, and economic factors (Helmond et al., 2015). A deeper understanding of *cognitive distortion* is essential in designing more effective prevention and rehabilitation policies. Programs that teach people an understanding of *cognitive distortion*, especially among adolescents and high-risk groups, are needed. By providing insight into a more rational and healthy way of thinking, it is hoped that it can reduce the potential for crime (Syasyila et al., 2015).

An approach based on cultural understanding should also be a major concern. As explained by the denial mechanism in perpetrators of sexual violence, it is often used to avoid responsibility for individual actions (Firnando et al., 2025). Strong self-justification is related to the perpetrator's efforts to maintain the individual's self-identity. A deeper understanding of *cognitive distortion* in the context of criminal behavior will make a major contribution to developing a more integrated approach to dealing with crime problems. By blending cognitive, social, and cultural perspectives, we can better understand the root causes of *cognitive distortion* that lead to criminal behavior. This will pave the way for the development of more comprehensive and evidence-based policies in the prevention and rehabilitation of offenders.

This research will also provide important insights in developing educational programs that teach understanding of *Cognitive Distortion*. Better education on healthy and rational thinking will help reduce the likelihood of crime. Thus, the urgency of this research is very clear. Given the complexity of the crime problem in Indonesia and the world, an approach based on a deeper psychological understanding of *cognitive distortion* will open up opportunities to create more sustainable solutions. Improvements in the education system, social interventions, and law enforcement policies can be more effective if they are based on a more comprehensive insight into how *cognitive distortion* plays a role in criminal behavior.

RESEARCH METHODS

The initial stage of research begins with the identification process, which is finding and collecting articles or data that are relevant to the research topic. At this stage, the researcher searches the literature through scientific databases using certain keywords that correspond to the

focus of the research. A total of 123 articles were found from the initial search results. However, not all articles can be used, so researchers set inclusion and exclusion criteria, such as the language of the publication, the type of research, and the relevance of the topic to the research objectives. Thus, the identification process becomes an important basis for filtering quality and appropriate sources.

After the articles are collected, the first exclusion step is carried out based on the publication language. Articles that were not published in English were published as many as 30 articles, leaving 93 articles. This step aims to facilitate the analysis, as publications in English are considered to be more widely recognized academically and facilitate the comparison of results between studies. With the initial exclusion, researchers can ensure that the literature used can be analyzed more consistently.

The next step is the screening stage, which is to ensure that the articles that have been identified are free of duplicate or irrelevant data. In this study, it was found that there were duplicates of 25 articles which were then deleted, so that the number of articles left to 68. Furthermore, a full evaluation of the content of the article was carried out as many as 31 selected articles. At this stage, the researcher assesses whether the article actually answers the research question, has good methodological quality, and provides relevant data for further analysis.

The next stage is eligibility, where the remaining articles are further checked for their quality and suitability. From the results of the evaluation, as many as 15 articles were eliminated because they did not meet quality standards or were not relevant enough to the research objectives. In the end, only 22 articles were deemed worthy of further analysis. At this stage, the researcher also conducts final verification, including assessing the clarity of the methodology, the validity of the data, and the contribution of the article to the research topic. Thus, the selected article is completely qualified to be used as a basis in a systematic analysis.

The research method based on the stages of identification, screening, and feasibility allows researchers to obtain articles or data with high quality and appropriate relevance. Through a gradual process, the number of articles that were originally successful was narrowed down to a more specific sample that is worthy of in-depth study. This not only maintains the validity of the research results, but also ensures the transparency of the source selection process, so that the research can be replicated and verified by other researchers.

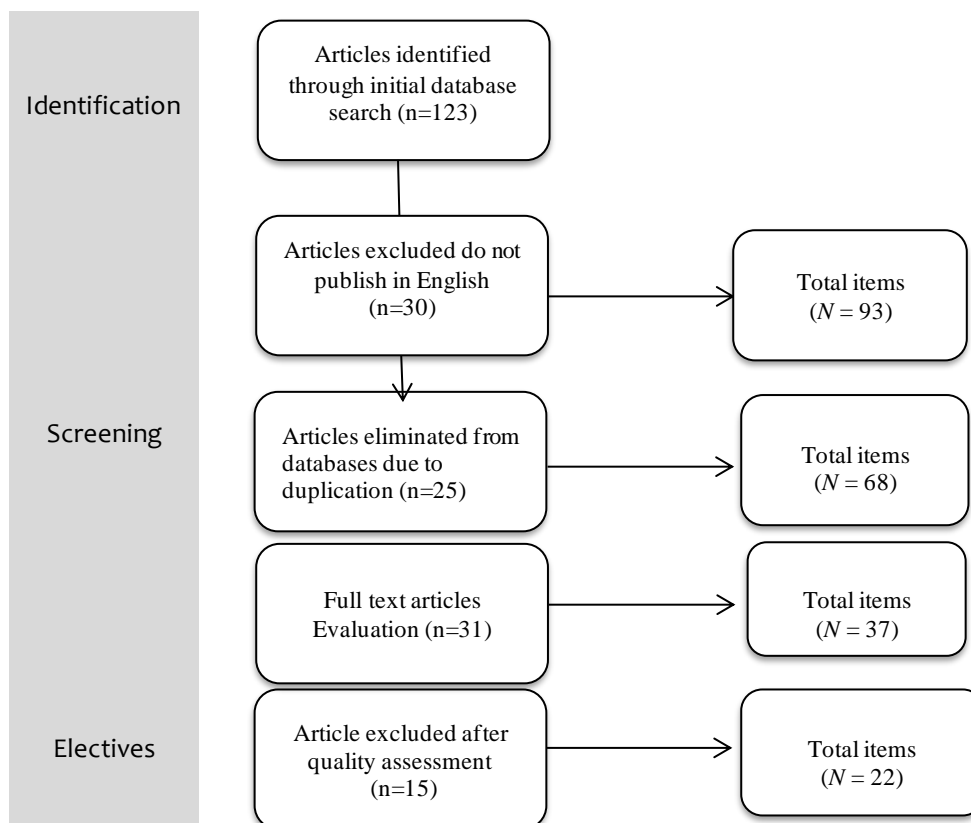


Figure 1. Research Subject

The data collection methods used were observation and interviews. Observation is carried out on a non-participant basis, where the researcher is not directly involved in the subject's life but rather only as an observer (Hasibuan & Jailani, 2023). This observation allows the researcher to record the behavior of the subjects relevant to the research problem in real-time. Structured interviews were also conducted to dig deeper information about the subject's experiences, feelings, and coping strategies. Interview guidelines are prepared in advance to ensure the focus of the data collected, and the interview process is supported by recording and recording so that the data obtained is more comprehensive.

Data analysis is carried out systematically through several stages, starting from organizing the data, breaking the data into small parts, summarizing findings, to drawing meaningful conclusions (Kurniawan, 2023). To ensure the validity of the data, triangulation techniques are used in the form of re-checking and cross-checking between data sources (Januarti et al., 2023). This triangulation aims to ensure the credibility of the findings so that the research results can be trusted and reliable. With this structured approach, the research is expected to be able to provide an in-depth overview of the toxic *relationship phenomenon* and its implications for Generation

RESEARCH RESULTS
Table 1. Reputation of Review Articles

	Journal Name	Sum
Q1	<i>American Journal of Sociology</i>	3
	<i>Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science</i>	2
	<i>Annual Review of Sociology</i>	1
	<i>Sociological Methods & Research</i>	2
	<i>Social Forces</i>	1
	<i>British Journal of Sociology</i>	1
	<i>Journal of Marriage and Family</i>	1
	<i>Theory and Society</i>	1
	<i>Sociology of Education</i>	1
	<i>Qualitative Sociology</i>	1

Q4	Journal Name	Sum
	<i>Journal of Interdisciplinary Research</i>	1
	<i>Global Journal of Advanced Research</i>	1
	<i>International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies</i>	1
	<i>Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences</i>	1
	<i>World Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development</i>	1
	<i>Journal of Social and Development Sciences</i>	2
	<i>International Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Science</i>	1

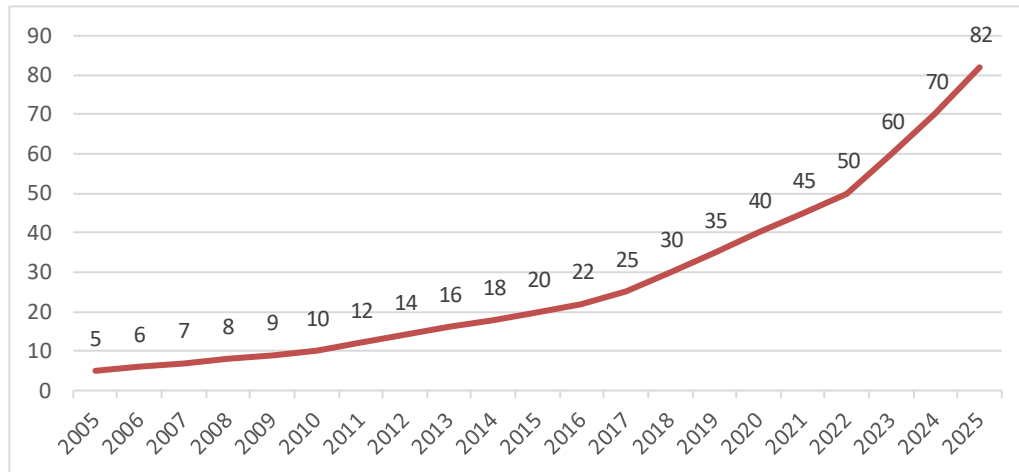


Figure 2. Increased publication on Cognitive Distortions

The graph shows the increase in the number of cognitive distortions publications from 2005 to 2025. In 2005, the number of publications was only about 5, but this figure has increased significantly in recent years, especially after 2015. A sharp increase was seen between 2018 and 2025,

where publications are expected to reach 82 by 2025. This trend illustrates the growing interest and recognition of acceptance therapy and commitment in academia and clinical practice.

Table 2. Number of Article Citations

Paper	Total Citations	Paper	Total Citations
The role of cognitive distortion in criminal behavior: a systematic literature review	2	Crime pattern theory	770
A meta-analysis on cognitive distortions and externalizing problem behavior: Associations, moderators, and treatment effectiveness	175	Child sexual offenders typologies: An exploratory profile model using multiple correspondence and cluster analysis of Portuguese convicted offenders sample	12
Cognitive distortion and problem behaviors in adolescents	404	The 'Butner Study'redux: A report of the incidence of hands-on child victimization by child pornography offenders	430
Self-serving cognitive distortions and antisocial behavior among adults and adolescents	142	Rapists' offense processes: A preliminary descriptive model	185
Empathy, social skills, and other relevant cognitive processes in rapists and child molesters	231	Selection and influence: A meta-analysis of the association between peer and personal offending	169
A review of the cognitive distortions in child sex offenders: An examination of the motivations and mechanisms that underlie the justification for abuse	119	Understanding denial in sexual offenders: A review of cognitive and motivational processes to avoid responsibility	172
Cognitive distortions among sexual offenders against women in Japan	14	Memory distortions: An interdisciplinary framework for cognitive-affective bias. In Affectivity and learning: Bridging the gap between neurosciences, cultural and cognitive psychology	2
The examination of the mediator role of optimism, self-compassion, altruism and gratitude in the	25	Childhood sexual abuse: Long-term sequelae and implications for psychological assessment	737

relationship between cognitive distortions and forgiveness of emerging adults			
Comparison of sex offenders to nonoffenders on selected psychological measures	377	Batterer intervention programmes: A meta-analytic review of effectiveness	345
Psychological effects of youth unemployment in Ghana. Journal of Social Sciences	23	An application of the theory of planned behavior to the proximal and distal etiology of sexual offending	28
Alexithymia, cognitive distortion and internet addiction: moderating role of emotional intelligence	3	Considering the pedophile subculture online	290

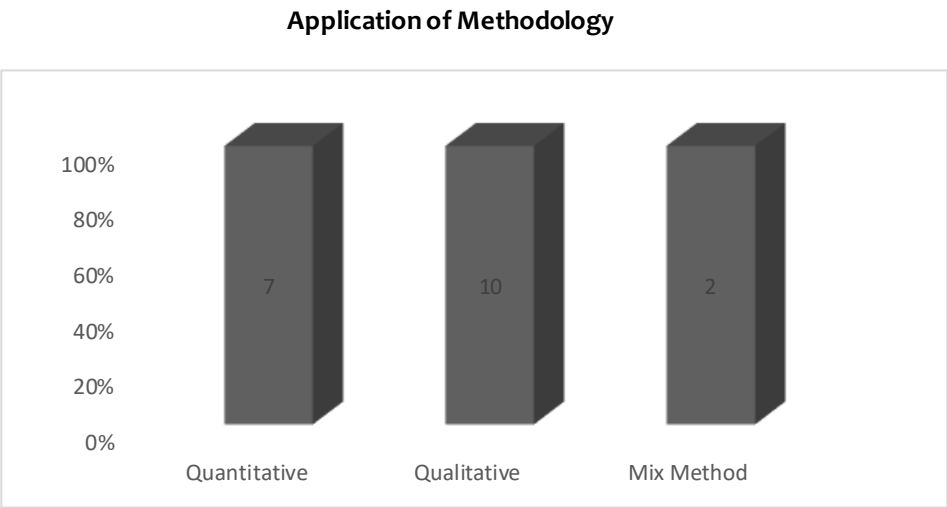


Figure 3. Application of Research Methods

The uploaded image shows a bar chart depicting three categories: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mix Method. Each category has a value recorded in the middle of the stem, with Quantitative amounting to 7, Qualitative amounting to 14, and Mix Method amounting to 2. This graph is presented with three dark gray vertical bars that represent the number for each category. Category labels are visible below each bar, while in the bottom right corner are the Back Wall button, which likely serves as a display control on this graph.

Table 3. Literature Review Results

Author / Year / Title	Purpose	Method	Findings (brief)	Updates
(São Paulo et al., 2015) <i>The role of cognitive distortion in criminal behavior: A systematic literature review.</i>	Systematically review the evidence on the role of cognitive distortion in criminal behavior, including the types of distortions, causal relationships, and implications of interventions.	Systematic literature review; synthesis of empirical and theoretical study findings (explicit inclusion criteria; thematic analysis/narrative synthesis).	Finding consistent evidence that various self-serving and minimization/distortion of empathy are related to external/criminal behavior; variations by type of crime and population, identification of longitudinal research gaps, and non-Western cultures.	Compiling and evaluating evidence until 2024; Highlight methodological gaps (e.g., lack of longitudinal studies, cross-cultural comparisons) as well as recent research/intervention recommendations.
(Helmond et al., 2015) <i>A meta-analysis on cognitive distortions and externalizing problem behavior: Associations, moderators, and</i>	Assess the strength of associations between cognitive distortion and external behaviors; test moderators; and assess the effects of interventions targeting distortion.	Quantitative meta-analysis on correlational and intervention studies; moderator analysis (age, setting, instrument).	Small to medium associations between cognitive distortion and external behaviors; the strength of the association varied by type of distortion and sample; cognitive interventions	First, integrating correlation and intervention evidence to evaluate moderation provide a quantitative understanding of the heterogeneity of effects.

treatment effectiveness.		showed moderate effectiveness.		
(Belly et al., 2000) Cognitive distortion and problem behaviors in adolescents.	Investigate the relationship between cognitive distortion and various problem behaviors in adolescents; evaluate the validity of distortion measurements.	Quantitative empirical studies with a sample of school/coaching adolescents; distortion measurement questionnaire and behavior report (cross-sectional).	Cognitive distortion is positively correlated with aggression, delinquency, and antisocial behavior; some specific distortions are more strongly associated with certain types of behavior.	One of the earliest studies to link the systematic measurement of cognitive distortion to adolescent behavior problems; contributing to the development of measuring tools.
(Wallinius et al., 2011) Self-serving cognitive distortions and antisocial behavior among adults and adolescents.	Compare patterns of self-serving cognitive distortion in adolescents and adults who exhibit antisocial behavior.	Cross-sectional comparative studies; samples from clinical/criminal justice and control populations; Distortion questionnaire and antisocial assessments.	Self-serving distortions were found in both groups; differences in intensity and type patterns between adolescents and adults; strong association with antisociality levels.	Compare cross-ages (adolescents vs. adults) directly; identify development/age patterns of cognitive distortion.
(Burn & Brown, 2006) A review of the cognitive distortions in child sex offenders: An examination of the motivations and mechanisms that underlie the justification for abuse.	Review the evidence on Cognitive distortion used by child abusers to justify their actions; discuss motivational mechanisms.	Narrative review/critical review of empirical and clinical studies related to sexual offenders.	Identifying common distortions: minimization, defining the victim as consenting, moral justification, and empathetic distortions; emphasizing the function of justification to reduce moral dissonance.	Combining clinical and theoretical perspectives to explain the mechanism of justification, is beneficial for specific interventions (treatment planning).
(Hazama & Katsuta, 2019) Cognitive distortions among sexual offenders against women in Japan.	Examining the type and prevalence of cognitive distortion in perpetrators of sexual violence against women in the Japanese context; looking at the link with the characteristics of the crime.	Empirical (quantitative) studies on a sample of perpetrators who were processed by law in Japan; Distortion questionnaire and criminal data.	Finding distortion patterns similar to Western studies (minimization, blaming victim) but also cultural nuances in the justification narrative; correlation with the level of sexual violence.	Local (Japanese) data that adds to the dominant Western literature; highlight the influence of cultural context on the expression of distortion.
(Uzun & Karataş, 2023) The examination of the mediator role of optimism, self-compassion, altruism, and gratitude in the relationship between cognitive distortions and forgiveness of emerging adults.	To test whether optimism, self-compassion, altruism, and gratitude mediate the relationship between cognitive distortion and the ability to forgive in young adults.	Quantitative studies, cross-sectional surveys of emerging adults; mediated analysis (SEM or tiered regression).	Cognitive distortion is negatively related to the ability to forgive; some psychosocial factors (e.g., self-compassion, gratitude) mediate this relationship in part.	Combining the literature on cognitive distortion with positive psychological processes (resilience factors) in the young adult population — provides direction for promotive (not just corrective) interventions.
(Uzun & Karataş, 2023) Comparison of sex offenders to nonoffenders on selected psychological measures.	Compare the psychological profiles (e.g. empathy, cognitive distortion, sexual function) between sexual and non-perpetrators.	An empirical comparative study with a battery of psychological tests on two groups (offenders vs nonoffenders).	Perpetrators showed differences in several psychological dimensions: higher distortions, empathy deficits, certain pathological patterns than controls.	Provide comparative profiles that help validate clinical aspects and guide forensic/rehabilitation assessments.
(Ward & Beech, 2006) An integrated theory	Present an integrative theory that maps the causative factors	A theoretical paper/integrative model, summarizing the	Propose a process model that places cognitive distortion as one of the	A major theoretical contribution: an integrative model that

of sexual offending.	(cognitive, emotional, social, biological) of sexual offenses.	empirical evidence for alternative models.	elements (e.g., crime scripts, deviant needs) that interacts with other factors.	links <i>cognitive distortion</i> to the dynamics of offense as well as the implications of schema/script-based treatment.
(Brooker & Marples, 2021) <i>Forensic Psychological Assessment in Death Penalty Cases</i>	Examine the role of empathy, social skills, and other cognitive processes in rapists and child abusers.	Empirical studies with empathy tests, social skills observations, and cognitive inventory; Comparison of crime groups.	Both groups showed deficits in empathy and social skills compared to controls; <i>patterns of cognitive distortion</i> differed by type of perpetrator.	Outline the relationship between social/empathy skills and distortion; relevant for social/emotional focus interventions.
(Amissah & Nyarko, 2017) <i>Psychological effects of youth unemployment in Ghana.</i>	Assess the psychological impact (stress, depression, possible risk behaviours) of youth unemployment in Ghana.	Quantitative survey on youth sample; correlational analysis.	Unemployment related to increased psychological distress, potential involvement in risk behaviors; limited protective factors.	Adding socio-economic context to the discussion of the determinants of criminal risk—pointing out structural conditions that can influence distortion/justification of behavior.
(Brantingham, 2013) <i>Crime pattern theory.</i>	Explain the theory of crime patterns that relate space, routine activities, and crime opportunities.	Theoretical chapters/conceptual reviews; integration of environmental concepts and criminal patterns.	Presents a framework for how the environment facilitates or inhibits criminal acts—focusing on opportunities, nodes, paths.	Provide an environmental context to understand the interaction between <i>cognitive distortion</i> and criminal opportunity (multidimensional approach).
(Trunk et al., 2022) <i>Child sexual offenders typologies: An exploratory profile model using multiple correspondence and cluster analysis of Portuguese convicted offenders sample.</i>	Developing a typology of child sexual offenders using multivariate techniques on a sample of Portuguese convicts.	Multivariate analysis: multiple correspondence analysis + cluster analysis on forensic data.	Identify several different typologies (e.g., opportunistic vs. organized) with different demographic, criminal, and psychological characteristics.	Advanced exploratory method approaches to construct empirical typologies; Help tailor interventions based on type.
(Bourke & Hernandez, 2009) <i>The 'Butner Study' redux: incidence of hands-on child victimization by child pornography offenders.</i>	Estimating incidents of 'hands-on' actions against children in perpetrators related to child pornography.	Forensic record/archaeology of cases (data archive review) — analysis of incident frequency.	Shows that the proportion of pornography perpetrators who also have direct contact is not small; implications for risk assessment.	Update/present empirical evidence for forensic practice and law enforcement policy; impact on risk assumptions.
(Polaschek et al., 2001) <i>Rapists' offense processes: A preliminary descriptive model.</i>	Describe the offense process in the rapist to understand the cognitive/emotional sequence before and during the action.	Mixed qualitative/quantitative studies: forensic interviews, case analysis, possibly psychometric scales.	Generate sequence models (scripts) that contain trigger, escalation, and justification factors— <i>Cognitive distortion</i> plays a role in the legitimacy of actions.	Provide a model of the offense process that can be tested and used for script-based interventions and cognitive precursors.
(Gallupe et al., 2019) <i>Selection and influence: A meta-analysis of the association between peer and</i>	Evaluate how much influence selection (choosing friends who do) vs the influence of friends on individual criminal behavior.	Quantitative meta-analysis on peer-offending relationship studies; moderator analysis.	Both mechanisms are significant: evidence that peer influence and selection both contribute; The effects vary by age and type of crime.	Bringing together quantitative evidence that confirms the importance of social context in the development of criminal

personal offending.				behavior—it is useful to associate cognitive distortion with group processes.
(Schneider & Wright, 2004) <i>Understanding denial in sexual offenders: A review of cognitive and motivational processes to avoid responsibility.</i>	Review the mechanism of denial and motivation behind the avoidance of responsibility in sexual offenders.	Theoretical/empirical review; integration of cognitive and motivational literature.	Denial is understood through cognitive distortion, coping strategies, and motives to maintain identity; implications for assessment and therapy.	Combining a cognitive-motivational perspective to understand denial—helps design intervention strategies that overcome resistance.
(Raposo, 2023) <i>Memory distortions: An interdisciplinary framework for cognitive-affective bias.</i>	Presents a cross-disciplinary framework of how memory distortions and affective biases shape perceptions and behaviors.	Theoretical chapter with a synthesis of cognitive, affective, and learning research.	Describe how memory bias reinforces behavioral justifications (including criminals) through self-narrative reconstruction.	Expand the discussion of distortion from just cognitive (logic/justification) to the memory-affective aspect—connecting trauma, memory, and rationalization.
(Briere & Runtz, 1993) <i>Childhood sexual abuse: Long-term sequelae and implications for psychological assessment.</i>	Reviewing the long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse on psychological function and its implications for assessment.	Long-term empirical review; synthesis of clinical findings.	Childhood abuse is related to various psychopathological problems, cognitive distortion, and relational issues in adulthood.	Affirm the relationship of early trauma to cognitive patterns that may affect the risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator; implications of a comprehensive assessment.
(Arias) et al., 2013) <i>Batterer intervention programmes: A meta-analytic review of effectiveness.</i>	Evaluate the effectiveness of intervention programs for perpetrators of domestic violence.	Meta-analysis on BIP program evaluation studies; Analysis of the effects on recidivism and behavior.	The effectiveness of the program varies; Some cognitive-behavioral approaches reduce violence moderately, but results depend on the quality of the program and the context.	A global synthesis that helps assess best practices; relevance for programs that target cognitive distortion in perpetrators.

DISCUSSION

Research on *cognitive distortion* in the context of criminal behavior continues to grow, with a growing body of evidence showing the important role of *cognitive distortion* in justifying deviant and criminal behavior (Syasyila et al., 2015). *Cognitive distortion* is a mental process that leads to a false interpretation of reality, and it allows individuals to justify or rationalize behaviors that do not conform to prevailing social norms (Helmond et al., 2015). This process is key in understanding how individuals can engage in criminal acts even though the individual consciously knows that the act is contrary to law and morality (Barriga et al., 2000). Many offenders not only rely on internal impulses to act, but also use *cognitive distortion* as a tool to minimize feelings of guilt, blame the victim, or even convince themselves that the individual is not responsible for the individual's actions (Wallinius et al., 2011). Further research on this *cognitive distortion* is essential to design more effective interventions in preventing and reducing criminal behaviour in society (Wallinius et al., 2011).

Uzun and Karataş (2023) His research on the role of *cognitive distortion* in criminal behavior highlights that such distortions can act as a powerful justification mechanism. In individual studies, distortions such as minimization and blaming the victim were found consistently in criminal behavior, suggesting that perpetrators often use *cognitive distortion* to reduce guilt and rationalize individual actions. Arias dkk. (2013) this becomes very important because, although this *cognitive distortion* can be seen as an internal phenomenon that occurs in the mind of the perpetrator, its impact is very broad because it can affect how the perpetrator interacts with others and how the perpetrator perceives the individual's actions in a social context (Fisher et al., 1999). This research provides important insights into how *cognitive distortion* operates in criminal situations and offers suggestions for the development of interventions that can reduce the impact of this distortion.(Schneider & Wright, 2004)

Wani (2024) Continuing research on *cognitive distortion* by conducting meta-analyses to evaluate the strength of associations between *cognitive distortion* and

external behaviors, as well as to test moderators that may affect the relationship. This study makes a significant contribution by showing that although the association between *cognitive distortion* and external behaviors such as aggression and delinquency tends to be small to moderate, moderator factors such as age, gender, and social setting can strengthen or weaken the relationship (Wani & Ahmed, 2024). These findings open up space for further research that could identify other factors that could modulate the relationship between *cognitive distortion* and criminal behavior (Yoder, 2024). In addition, the study also assessed the effectiveness of interventions targeting *cognitive distortion*, suggesting that cognitive interventions can have a moderate impact on reducing criminal behavior, although the results vary depending on the context (Ceccato, 2024).

The study of the relationship between Agnihotri (2023) *cognitive distortion* and problematic behavior in adolescents adds an important dimension to our understanding of *cognitive distortion* in young individuals. *Cognitive distortion* was found to have a significant correlation with aggressive, delinquency, and antisocial behavior in adolescents (Tanigör, 2025). This suggests that *cognitive distortion* may serve as a strong predictor factor against high-risk behaviors in adolescents, who are often still in the self-identification stage (Oğuztüzün, 2023). The study emphasizes the importance of intervening early with a focus on developing empathy and strengthening social values, especially in the family and school environment, so that the *cognitive distortion* that develops in adolescents does not continue to become criminal behavior later in life (Wani, 2024).

Holt dkk. (2010) Develop research on *cognitive distortion* by comparing patterns of self-serving cognitive distortion between adolescents and adults who exhibit antisocial behavior. The study revealed that although *cognitive distortion* was found in both groups, there were differences in the intensity and type of distortion between adolescents and adults. This suggests that *cognitive distortion* develops with age and life experience, and this could serve as a basis for designing more specific interventions based on age groups (Rana et al., 2024). *Cognitive distortion* in adolescents, for example, is more likely to be related to the abuse of power in individual social relationships, while in adults, this distortion may be related to the avoidance of responsibility and self-justification for more serious actions (Firnando et al., 2025). These findings make an important contribution to designing rehabilitation programs based on different stages of individual development (Arias et al., 2013).

Research on Raposo (2023) *cognitive distortion* in child abusers provides a deeper perspective on how perpetrators of sexual violence use *cognitive distortion* to justify individual actions (Arias et al., 2013). In individual studies, distortions such as minimizing and defining the victim as the party who consented to the act were found to be very common among child molesters (Brantingham, 2013). Its distortions allow the perpetrator to deceive the individual

self and reduce the individual's guilt even though the act is clearly detrimental to the victim. This study provides valuable insights into the justification mechanisms used by perpetrators of sexual violence, which is critical for the development of more effective rehabilitation programs (Schneider & Wright, 2004). The novelty of this study lies in the incorporation of clinical and theoretical perspectives to explain how *cognitive distortion* functions in the perpetrator's self-justification process (Amissah & Nyarko, 2017).

Wani (2024) examined *cognitive distortion* in perpetrators of sexual violence against women in Japan, and individuals found patterns of distortion similar to findings from Western studies, such as minimization and *blaming of the victim*. However, individuals also find that there are cultural nuances that affect the way the perpetrator expresses the justification (Wani & Ahmed, 2024). This suggests that although *cognitive distortion* has universal similarities, cultural context plays a significant role in how these distortions are articulated and accepted by individuals in a particular society (Ceccato, 2024). These findings provide the basis for the development of more culturally sensitive intervention approaches, which can be adapted to the values and norms that apply in each community. Thus, an understanding of *cognitive distortion* must consider the cultural context so that the interventions carried out are more targeted and effective (Yoder, 2024).

Briere and Runtz (1993) researched to explore whether psychosocial factors such as optimism, *self-compassion*, *altruism*, and *gratitude* could mediate the relationship between *cognitive distortion* and forgiving ability in young adults. Individuals found that *cognitive distortion* was negatively associated with the ability to forgive, but some psychosocial factors such as *self-compassion* and *gratitude* may help partially mediate this relationship Agnihotri (2023). These findings suggest that although *cognitive distortion* can inhibit a person's ability to forgive, positive psychosocial factors can play an important role in reducing the negative impact of *cognitive distortion* (Wani & Ahmed, 2024). This research paves the way for a more proactive approach to intervention, which focuses not only on the correction of *cognitive distortion*, but also on the development of healthier psychological aspects that can help individuals to overcome *cognitive distortion* and improve individual well-being (Tanigör, 2025).

Another study was conducted by comparing the psychological profiles between perpetrators of sexual violence and non-perpetrators. The results showed that perpetrators of sexual violence had higher levels Briere and Runtz (1993) of *cognitive distortion* and significant empathy deficits compared to the control group. This suggests that Holt dkk. (2010) *cognitive distortion* and lack of empathy are important factors in the formation of a psychological profile of sexual abusers, which can be used to aid forensic assessment and rehabilitation therapy planning. These findings are critical to designing a more focused approach to the perpetrator's psychological factors, which can help

reduce the likelihood of future sexual violence.(Brantingham, 2013)

Rana dkk. (2024) proposes an integrative theory that maps the causative factors of sexual offenses, including cognitive, emotional, social, and biological factors. In this theory, *cognitive distortion* is considered to be one of the elements that interact with other factors, such as deviant needs and crime scripts, in the process of a sexual offense occurring (Miller, 2010). This theory provides a more comprehensive understanding of how *cognitive distortion* functions in the process of offense, as well as how other factors interact with each other to influence the perpetrator's decision to commit a criminal act (Arias et al., 2013). The novelty of this research lies in the development of a process model that can be used to design schema- and script-based interventions that focus on changing the mindset of actors.

Belly et al. (2000) examine the role of empathy and social skills in forensic assessment of death penalty cases. Individuals found that perpetrators of rape and child abuse showed significant deficits in empathy and social skills compared to the control group (Brantingham, 2013). This research emphasizes the importance of understanding the relationship between social skills, empathy, and *cognitive distortion* in the context of forensic psychological evaluation (Schneider & Wright, 2004). The novelty of this study is the identification of different *patterns of cognitive distortion* according to the type of perpetrator, which provides new insights to design interventions that are more targeted and based on the psychological profile of the perpetrator (Amissah & Nyarko, 2017).

São Paulo and Follette (1995) examine the psychological impact of unemployment on criminal behavior in Ghana. Individuals found that unemployment can increase stress, depression, and potential involvement in risky behaviors, including criminal behavior. This shows the importance of considering structural factors such as socio-economic conditions in research that addresses (Townasley, 2024)*cognitive distortion* and criminal behavior. This research provides a broader perspective on how external conditions can affect the way individuals manage (Ceccato, 2024)*individual cognitive distortion*, as well as how social interventions can reduce the negative impact of unemployment on criminal behavior (Arias et al., 2013).

Agnihotri (2023) Explain the theory of crime patterns that relate space, routine activities, and crime opportunities. According to Miller (2010) the chances of committing crimes are greatly influenced by the individual's daily behavior patterns, which creates opportunities for individuals to engage in criminal behavior. This research provides a useful theoretical framework in understanding how *cognitive distortion* interacts with environmental factors in influencing an individual's decision to commit a crime. By combining environmental and cognitive factors (Holt et al., 2010).

Babcock (2024) Develop a typology of child sexual violence perpetrators using multivariate analysis techniques. Individuals identify several different typologies of

perpetrators, based on demographic, criminal, and psychological traits. These findings pave the way for a more tailored approach to designing rehabilitation and intervention programs, taking into account the specific types of perpetrators and characteristics that individuals have. This approach helps make interventions more effective by targeting factors that contribute to offenders' criminal behavior (Rana et al., 2024).

Whittemore and Knafl (2005) Updating research on the relationship between child pornography perpetrators and incidents of physical violence against children. Individuals found that the proportion of child pornography perpetrators who also had direct physical contact with children was not small (Briere & Runtz, 1993). These findings provide important implications for risk assessment in child pornography cases, as well as for more effective law enforcement policies in preventing sexual violence against children (Wani & Ahmed, 2024). This research encourages a more holistic policy revision in handling cases of sexual violence against children (Miller, 2010).

Townasley (2024) Describe the offense process in rapists to understand the cognitive and emotional sequence before and during the crime. This model identifies the various triggering and justifying factors used by the perpetrator to legitimize individual actions (Geer et al., 2000). These findings are particularly useful in designing script-based interventions that focus on changing perpetrators' mindsets, as well as on the factors that influence the escalation of violent behavior (Brantingham, 2013).

Conclusion

Cognitive distortion in criminal behavior suggests that distortions such as minimization, blaming the victim, and self-serving play an important role in justifying the perpetrator, reducing guilt, and reinforcing the decision to engage in criminal behavior. This distortion is not only found in criminals, but also in at-risk individuals, such as teenagers seeking self-identity. These findings underscore the importance of early interventions that change mindsets and strengthen empathy, especially in high-risk groups. Educational programs that teach an understanding of *cognitive distortion* and a healthy social perspective can help prevent crime. This research also implies that prevention and rehabilitation policies need to take into account the role of *cognitive distortion*, with approaches based on psychology, social, and culture to be more effective in tackling crime and reducing relapse in perpetrators.

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