

Running head: INDIVIDUAL PERCEPTION ON CRIME SEVERITY

Individual Perception on Crime Severity among College Students

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Abstract

The following study examined perceptions of crime severity among college students. It was hypothesized that criminology students would render longer sentence length for various crimes (sexual assault, battery, petty thief) than psychology students. Secondly, it was predicted that among victim types, (felony, misdemeanor, non-victim) felony victims would give more punishment compared to misdemeanor and non-victims. Thirdly, it was expected that the perpetrator in the sexual assault situation would be given a longer sentence than battery or petty thief perpetrators. Finally, criminology students who were a victim of a felony crime would give longer sentences to the sexual assault crime. Results revealed no significant differences between college majors and victim types as well as no interaction effects of college major, type of victim, and type of crime on length of punishment.

However, there were significant differences in punishment given among the various types of crime. The perpetrator in the sexual assault vignette was given longer punishment than perpetrators in either battery or petty thief vignettes. Limitations of this study include lack of information regarding if participants who were previously convicted of a crime, personal experiences, small sample size and no gender comparisons were made. Implications and future directions are also discussed.