

ATTITUDES TOWARD FORENSIC SCIENCE: A DISCONNECT BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY

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ABSTRACT

Following the development of the Attitudes Toward Forensic Science (ATFS) instrument (Horton et al., 2012), students across various tertiary institutions were surveyed to measure their: perception of popular media as a motivator to study forensic science; personal interest in forensic science; perspective of forensic science as a science; and perspective of forensic science as a profession. The focus of the study was changed from a single survey to pre- and post-unit completion testing, in order to compare not only the teaching/learning experience across the institutions, but also the efficiency and effectiveness of each individual unit. However, before pre- and post-unit completion testing could be utilised effectively, the observable differences in a single data collection were ascertained along with the psychometric properties (reliability and validity) of the instrument itself, in order to determine what constructs were truly being measured. The data underwent a preliminary Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to identify the underlying relationship between measured variables, which established a tenable model of the data. After a second round of surveying students, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was undertaken to determine how well the data fit the hypothesised eleven-item, three-factor model. The three factors and the overall scale were examined for evidence of internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. The emergent model has provided a better understanding of students' attitudes toward the discipline of forensic science. The disconnect between our anticipated *a priori* model and the reality of the respondents' attitudes illustrates the importance of addressing measurement issues of reliability and validity when exploring contemporary affective concepts.

REFERENCES

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