

Emotional Experiences of Crime Victims during Victim-offender Confrontations and the Meaning of Apologies

– Qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews for
individuals who lost a family member due to juvenile crime –

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Recent studies show a movement in Japan toward adapting restorative justice in the field of juvenile crime. In this study, in-depth interviews were held for individuals who lost a family member due to juvenile crime. This study was aimed at researching a victim's emotional experience in confrontational situations between victims and offenders, in order to reveal the meanings of apologies. It is believed that the findings would add knowledge for people who are involved with victims after the crime and would provide insight into more therapeutic jurisprudence, which includes the view of recovery regarding victims.

Three individuals were interviewed, and the data were analyzed utilizing the KJ method. As a result, 11 concepts were extracted and were integrated into four categories, such as: "longing for an apology as a norm," "longing for the disclosure of feelings," "longing for the recognition and atonement of guilt," and "longing for apology as a form of remembrance." By theoretically analyzing the obtained results, the following hypothesis emerged: For an apology after a serious offence where forgiveness could hardly be expected, the apology still has value as "an apology with no premise for forgiveness."

In the situation where "an apology with no premise for forgiveness" takes place, it was suggested that: (1) it is meaningful for victims when the victim's position is elevated as an offender's apology continues; (2) it is meaningful for victims that offenders take part in the process of remembrance; and (3) it is meaningful for victims when reparations are made, as these are more valued than verbal apologies with no sincerity attached. There are multiple levels in an offender's recognition of guilt. However, whatever the level is, victims long for the atonement of guilt. Therefore, it is essential for offenders to take action to remedy the loss that victims suffer.

"An apology with no premise for forgiveness" consists of the process of filling the gap between victims and offenders. Although the process can never end, it becomes a testing of reality for victims regarding whether they can live with their harsh reality, such as in feeling no remorse or empathy from the offender, feeling a large gap with the offender in terms of recognizing the magnitude of the loss, and ultimately, feeling that the offender is still alive and well.