Predictive Validity of Adult- and Juvenile-Specific Risk Assessment Tools With JSOs

Christopher A. Ralston, Ph.D.
Grinnell College
Claire Lowe
Grinnell College
Samantha Schwartz
Grinnell College
Douglas L. Epperson, Ph.D.
California State Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo

An often-held assumption in the area of sexual recidivism risk assessment is that different tools should be used for adults and juveniles. This assumption is driven either by the observation that adolescents tend to be in a constant state of flux in the areas of development, education, and social structure or by the fact that the judicial system recognizes that juveniles and adults are different. Though the assumption is plausible, it is largely untested.

Ralston and Epperson (2013) tested this assumption by scoring two tools designed for adults, the Minnesota Sex Offender Screening Tool—Revised (MnSOST-R; Epperson et al., 2004) and the Static-99 (Harris et al., 2003), and two tools designed specifically for JSOs, the Juvenile-Sex Offender Assessment Protocol II (J-SOAP II; Prentky & Righthand, 2003) and the Juvenile Risk Assessment Scale (JRAS; New Jersey Attorney General’s Office, 2006) on an exhaustive sample of 636 JSOs from Utah. The researchers found that the adult risk assessment tools predicted juvenile sexual recidivism significantly and at approximately the same level of accuracy as the juvenile-specific tools’ total scores. Those findings have important implications for sexual offender risk management policy, as it applied to JSOs. However, before changes to policy and practice are made, the results must be replicated.

The present study replicated and expanded the study by Ralston and Epperson using two different large and exhaustive samples of JSOs: one from Utah (n = 566) and another from Iowa (n = 529). The same adult- and juvenile-specific tools used in the previous study were scored on all JSOs. In addition, the Juvenile Sexual Offense Recidivism Risk Assessment Tool-II (JSORAT-II; Epperson et al., 2006; Epperson & Ralston, 2014) and the Texas Juvenile Sex Offender Risk Assessment Instrument (TJSORAI; Texas Department of Criminal Justice, 2005) were also scored on these samples as a tools specifically designed for JSOs. As well, the adult-specific Risk Matrix-2000 (RM-2000; Thornton, 2007) and the risk tiers from the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA) outlined in the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act (2006) were scored for additional comparisons. Recidivism was defined as any new charge for an offense before the age of 18, and recidivism status was collected through a search of the Utah and Iowa criminal
offender databases. Recidivism checks occurred for sexual (general, violent, felony-level), violent (sexual, non-sexual), and general recidivism. Tools and risk tiers were scored and subjected to a variety of statistical analyses, including the area under the receiver operating characteristic curve (AUC) analysis, logistic regression analysis, and Hanley and McNeil’s critical ratio-z for comparing two AUC values.

Consistent with the findings of Ralston and Epperson (2013), we hypothesized that the tools designed for adults will perform similarly to those designed for juveniles. However, preliminary analyses only partially confirm that hypothesis, while others contradict Ralston and Epperson’s previous findings. Specifically, the only adult tool that significantly predicted juvenile sexual recidivism was the MnSOST-R, but that tool only significantly predicted sexual recidivism in the Iowa sample (not significant in the Utah sample). In contrast, the J-SOAP-II and the JSORRAT-II significantly predicted sexual recidivism in both Iowa and Utah. Additional results will be reported during the paper presentation. Further, the authors will discuss the implication of the findings for sexual offender risk assessment and risk management policy.

References


**Christopher A. Ralston, Ph.D.**
A member of ATSA, Christopher A. Ralston is an associate professor of psychology at Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa. He received his Ph.D. in counseling psychology from Iowa State University, and he is a licensed psychologist in Iowa. Chris also is a co-developer of the Juvenile Sexual Offense Recidivism Risk Assessment Tool – II (JSORRAT-II).

**Claire K. Lowe**
Claire Lowe graduated with honors from Grinnell College in May 2014 with a double-major in Psychology and Art.

**Samantha L. Schwartz**
Samantha Schwartz graduated with honors from Grinnell College in May 2014 with a major in Psychology.

**Douglas L. Epperson, Ph.D.**
A member of ATSA, Douglas L. Epperson is the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo. Prior to his recent appointment, he served as Dean at Washington State University and both Associate Dean and Professor of Psychology at Iowa State University. Doug is the lead developer of the Minnesota Sex Offense Screening Tool – Revised (MnSOST-R) and the Juvenile Sexual Offense Recidivism Risk Assessment Tool – II (JSORRAT-II). He received his Ph.D. in counseling psychology from Ohio State University.