Sex Offender Treatment Intervention Progress Scale: Reliability and Validity

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This symposium addresses the implementation of the Sex Offender Treatment Intervention Progress Scale (SOTIPS). The SOTIPS has the potential to greatly improve our ability to assess risk, and changes in risk, over time. It adds dynamic factors that have been linked to risk of reoffending and are amenable to treatment. The SOTIPS has the potential to improve treatment by systematically tracking progress and identifying areas for intervention. In this symposium, we will discuss our rigorous mixed methods analysis of the utility of the SOTIPS. Three papers will be presented. The first paper describes a qualitative analysis of the interactions between probation officers and treatment providers in the intervention sites. Focus groups and surveys were used to examine this working relationship. Our second paper will discuss the psychometric properties of the SOTIPS including the interrater reliability, factor structure, and indications of the potential for SOTIPS to improve risk prediction beyond that offered by static risk tools, e.g., Static-99R. The final paper will discuss the interpretation of SOTIPS scores based on local versus population norms.

Probation and Treatment:
Working Relationships in Two Major U.S. Metropolitan Areas

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Probation departments within the U.S. criminal justice system use a variety of means to monitor and treat sex offenders --- with many probation departments coordinating probation supervision with the work of therapists specializing in treating sexual offenders. This paper is a qualitative description of the probation and treatment systems supervising and treating sex offenders in two major U.S. metropolitan areas.
Two large metropolitan probation departments, one from the Southwest and one from a Mid-Atlantic state, were selected as recruitment sites. Sites were selected if they provided uniform, jurisdiction-wide sex offender supervision and treatment services for 300-500 sex offenders; supervised a socioeconomically and ethnically diverse population of sex offenders; and had contracts with treatment agencies providing coordinated outpatient treatment for these offenders.

Fifty-three probation officers and therapists took part in four focus groups, two for probation officers (n=27) and two for treating therapists (n=23). Focus groups were held at the probation agency at each of the two metropolitan area sites. Two focus groups were held at each site; one for probation officers and one for treatment providers. In addition, nine treatment agencies (five from the Southwest site and four from the Mid-Atlantic site) completed a survey (Safer Societies Survey, McGrath, Cumming, Burchard, Zeoli, & Ellerby, 2009) about their sex offender clients and the types of services they provided.

A research team from the University of Minnesota examined the relationships between probation officers and treatment providers, the environments in which they each worked and the similarities and differences between sites. Qualitative analysis revealed several general themes: varied styles and amounts of communication between probation and treatment professionals, difficulties implementing monitoring requirements (e.g., GPS, home and computer monitoring, etc), the importance of accountability (via regular home visits and offender responsibility), and concerns about effective and efficient assessment tools. Frustrations of probation officers included the lack of consistent and high quality method(s) to track an offender’s progress through supervision and treatment; lack of consistent consequences for offenders for lack of progress; lack of consistent communication between therapists and probation officers; and the different perspectives and focus of probation officers vs. treatment providers hindering effective working relationships. On the other hand, both probation officers and treatment providers acknowledged the importance of each other’s work, as well as a desire for a collegial and collaborative approach in working effectively to help sex offenders make progress toward rehabilitation and community re-integration. Observations of what is working well are used to make recommendations for future supervision and treatment.

Goals of the Paper:
1. To compare and contrast two large probation department responsible for the supervision and treatment of sex offenders.
2. Explore the interactions between probation officers and treatment providers.
3. Identify frustrations experiences by probation officers and treatment providers.
Preliminary Measurement Properties of SOTIPS

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SOTIPS represents a generation of instruments designed to increase the precision of risk prediction and measure the contribution of changeable and changing risk factors, which are the target of treatment and management interventions. In this paper, we provide preliminary analyses of the reliability and validity of SOTIPS. Specifically, we are interested in the structure of the instrument, the unique contribution of each subscale to identifying risks and needs, and the degree to which SOTIPS measures unique risk factors when compared to Static-99R. At this stage of our research, we do not have re-offending information, so we will explore SOTIPS within the context of the probation supervision environment in our two implementation sites. Currently, we’ve conducted a Principal Components Analysis that indicated the structure of the measure is consistent with that proposed in the scoring protocols. Our presentation will include a Confirmatory Factor Analysis, which will test the goodness of fit of the structure proposed by McGrath et al. (2012). Our analyses indicate that SOTIPS, while significantly associated with Static-99R has substantial unique variance (r=.20), and the domains of treatment and supervision cooperation and social stability and supports are not associated with Static-99R score. Additionally, our analyses indicate that different patterns of SOTIPS domain scales predict different types of probation officer contact patterns that is number of office contacts, residence contacts, or job site contacts. The timing of the scoring of SOTIPS precludes the officers using the scores to determine level of contact. We will, however, be monitoring how changes in SOTIPS influences changes in probation officer level of contact with probationers.

Our preliminary analyses will be discussed with respect to the psychometric characteristics of the instrument and the implications of our findings for its potential incremental validity in predicting reoffending risk and tracking changes resulting from treatment and management interventions.

Goals of the Paper:
1. To discuss the psychometric characteristics of SOTIPS
2. To provide preliminary indications of its usefulness and explore its potential for forensic application
3. Identify issues indicating caution in application of SOTIPS.
Interpreting local versus Population Norms for SOTIPS

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The risk category labels associated with sexual offender risk tools have serious consequences for how offenders are managed in the criminal justice system. In comparison to offenders labeled “low risk”, “high risk” offenders are likely to serve longer in prison, have more restrictive release conditions, and be required to attend more treatment. The laws and regulatory statutes of many jurisdictions contain public protection measures that uniquely apply to sexual offenders who have received the “high risk” label. Given the importance of risk labels, there has been surprising little discussion about what they actually mean. Within the structured professional judgment tradition (e.g., SVR-20), risk labels are assigned by the evaluator and refer to the how much service is required to manage the case. For empirical actuarial risk tools, including SOTIPS, the risk labels are assigned by the test developers. It is not clear, however, that the same principles for assigning labels are shared by test developers, or even whether the same principles are used by the same test developers for different tools.

SOTIPS was designed as an inventory of risk-relevant issues worthy of consideration in the treatment and supervision of sexual offenders (i.e., criminogenic needs). As a criterion-reference measure, it was not intended to measure a single psychological or behavior dimension. Instead, the McGrath et al.’s (2012) risk categories (low, moderate, high) intended to describe the overall density of criminogenic needs (few, some, many), with roughly 1/3 of the original Vermont sample in each category. The current presentation examines the stability of these SOTIPS risk categories in new, relatively representative probation samples from New York City and Maricopa Country, Arizona.

When considering the stability of risk categories across settings, an important question is what should remain stable? In particular, should the low/moderate/high categories divide each of the new samples into thirds (i.e., norms defined locally), or should the risk categories be defined in terms of abstract population values. There is no need to choose between local versus population norms when the distribution of scores is consistent across settings. When the distributions differ, as was observed for the Arizona and Vermont samples, then we must decide between local versus population reference categories. Although each approach has its own advantages and disadvantages, the overall benefits of defining risk categories in terms of population values privileges the search for a common language of risk communication. Ultimately, this common language would not only apply to the SOTIPS across jurisdictions, but it would also apply across different risk assessment tools. The foundations needed for a common language of risk communication will be discussed.
Goals of the Paper:
1. Learn the meaning of SOTIPS risk categories
2. Understand the difference between using interpreting risk scales based on local norms compared to population norms
3. Increase the precision with which evaluators use the terms “low”, “moderate” and “high” in risk communication.