PROTECTIVE FACTORS AND GOOD LIVES

Protective Factors in Violent and Sexual Offenders' Criminal Forensic Evaluations: Some Empirical Results

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Traditionally, forensic psychologists and psychiatrists have been called on to diagnose defendants and determine whether they can be held criminally accountable for their actions. Increasingly, however, the criminal justice system is also tasking these professionals with assessing defendants’ risk of violence, chances of relapse, and threat to public safety over long or even indeterminate periods of time. In several countries, experts are also expected to advise on mandatory treatment verdicts, which can be delivered in addition to or in place of standard sentences. The treatments can be outpatient, inpatient, or even indefinite commitment. Such verdicts aim to protect public safety by preventing violent relapses and can be handed down regardless of accountability, psychiatric diagnosis, and sentence length. Experts are asked to make risk assessments for mandatory treatment verdicts before or during the trial and also afterwards, about every two years, to help judges to decide whether the verdict should be abrogated or, on the contrary, extended. Despite judges’ critical attitude towards the capabilities of forensic science, in most cases they nevertheless follow experts’ recommendations, particularly regarding treatment and risk assessment. It is therefore essential to select consistent, reliable, and valid methods for conducting expert criminal forensic evaluations.

Many different instruments are used to assess violence and sexual violence risk. In addition, research on risk assessment over the last decade has underlined not only the importance of static and dynamic risk factors, but also the identification of protective factors. Protective factors are defined as strengths that can prevent individuals from committing violence by counterbalancing or weakening risk factors. Treatments to prevent risk of violence should thus aim to minimize risk factors and strengthen protective factors. Protective factors include a few static factors, such as intelligence and childhood attachment, but are mainly dynamic factors, such as coping abilities, social support, and empathy skills.

By taking protective factors into account, treatment can be focused on positive individual features, which could be more motivating for offenders. A strength-based approach allows offenders to be considered not only as a sum of risk factors, but also as an
individual with positive features. This reduces offenders’ feelings of stigmatization and fatalism and therefore offers more interesting, individualized, and motivating treatment plans and perspectives. Moreover, an integrated assessment of risk and protection could diminish risk-assessment bias, notably in terms of false positives since protective factors might moderate overvalued risk factors’ impact.

The structured assessment of protective factors for violence risk (SAPROF) is a rather new risk assessment instrument designed to measure protective factors that may mitigate violent and sexual offending recidivism risk. The SAPROF has shown good interrater reliability and significant negative correlations with others risk instruments. The SAPROF has also demonstrated an incremental validity notably when combined with other risk assessment instruments (de Vries Robbe et al., 2013).

In general, more findings are needed to confirm the incremental benefits of the SAPROF in violence assessment notably in different assessment’ contexts. This paper aimed at: (1) evaluating the validity and predictive accuracy of the SAPROF in 94 violent and sexual violent male offenders; (2) determining if and how the SAPROF can strengthen violence and sexual violence risk assessments in criminal forensic contexts, notably in 161 pre-trial assessments when combined with other instruments – HCR-20, SVR-20, VRAG, Static-99- (3) characterizing 105 violent vs sexual offenders distinctive protective and risk factors and their potential implications for clinical treatment.

Results showed among others that the SAPROF had good inter-rater reliability. However, in terms of predictive accuracy, the SAPROF did not perform as well as expected when compared with other risk instruments and with previous SAPROF accuracy validation studies. Sexual offenders present distinctive protective and risk features that may be target in clinical treatments.

References:

Learning Goals and Objectives
In the context of forensic criminal evaluations, where there are often specific time constraints and a strong need for efficiency, we investigated if:

- The SAPROF is a reliable and accurate instrument that experts shouldn’t hesitate to use in their evaluations for methodological reasons
- The SAPROF - together with actuarial or SPJ instruments- can predict risk more accurately than actuarial or SPJ instruments alone and therefore its use to assess violence risk could be worthy and not only time consuming.
- Above the SAPROF incremental predictive validity, protective factors assessment should be used at the pretrial stage as an instrument for specific needs, notably to serve as baseline for repeated posttrial follow-ups or to advise on the most appropriate compulsory treatment measures
The SAPROF - together with the HCR-20 or SVR-20- can discriminate specific protective/ risk factors in violent vs sexual offenders that may be specifically targeted in treatment
Specific protective factors reassessments – in clinical or forensic contexts- could show treatment gain (or lack thereof) and aid in legal decision making

Validating the Measure of Life Priorities:
A Questionnaire Based Measure of Good Lives Model Goods

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This paper describes efforts to validate the “Measure of Life Priorities” (MLP) as a measure of the primary human goods as set out in the Good Lives Model (GLM) (Ward & Stewart, 2003). The basic assumption of the GLM is that all human seek to achieve the same eleven primary human goods, or life priorities (Ward & Stewart, 2003). As a framework for understanding offending behaviour, the GLM suggests offending occurs when criminogenic needs act as obstacles to the ability to attain primary human goods in pro-social ways (Willis, Ward, & Levenson, 2014). The GLM has typically been applied to populations of sex offenders, however, it has recently been suggested to be efficacious as a treatment framework in more diverse populations of offenders (Barnao, Robertson, & Ward, 2010; Gannon, King, Miles, Lockerbie, & Willis, 2011; Langlands, Ward, & Gilchrist, 2009; Roberston, Barnao, & Ward, 2011; Thakker & Ward, 2010). In efforts to support research on the GLM, Loney and Harkins, (2016) developed the MLP; a questionnaire developed to reflect some of the content typically assessed through clinical interview to ascertain a client’s primary and secondary primary human goods, as denoted in the GLM. Administering a measure in this format will allow for more accessible, frequent, and streamlined administration in research.

In order for the MLP to continue to be seen as a useful tool for research in this area, it must be validated. This paper describes efforts to do so, and presents preliminary results of these efforts. The MLP will be validated against GLM relevant constructs, and reliability of the measure will be evaluated. Efforts will also be taken to explicitly measure the MLP’s ability to relate to sex offending by considering its relationship with measures of deviant sexual interest proclivity and measures of rape supportive cognitions. This will allow authors to draw parallels between these constructs and what is currently known about endorsement of certain primary and secondary human goods in sex offenders (for example, the relationship between a self-reported interest in sex offending and deficits in prosocial attainment of the primary human goods of agency, relatedness, and inner peace (Barnett & Wood, 2008)). The implications of validating this measure include broadening the settings in which the GLM can be studied, and providing a tool to research seeking to further examine the theoretical underpinnings, and application of the GLM.
References

Learning Goals and Objectives:
- To facilitate understanding of how a questionnaire version of the GLM interview will benefit research on, and application of, the GLM.
- To discuss the validation of the MLP with respect to relevant psychological and criminological constructs.
- To discuss the reliability of the MLP compared to known with measures of deviant sexual interest proclivity and measures of rape supportive cognitions.