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2018 ATSA Conference | Thursday October 18 | POSTER

Measuring Prosocial Reasoning in Juveniles who Sexually Offended

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A central issue in the treatment of juveniles who sexually offended (JwSO), and for the general juvenile probation population, is what factors contribute to initial offending, and likewise to subsequent reoffending. A corollary issue is can such factors or traits be easily and reliably measured? The presentation addresses one factor which has been identified in the literature as a risk factor for both offending and reoffending, the youth's level of prosocial or moral reasoning. This factor has been well documented in the general probation literature (Stams, et al., 2006), and there is also evidence as well for JwSO's. Deficits in prosocial or moral reasoning may likely contribute to sexual offending in juveniles, and relate to Bonner's observation that early adolescence is a high risk transitory period for sexual offending. Both neuroimaging and neuropsychological assessment indicates that generally probation youth may have a 5 to 10 year delay in prosocial reasoning, compared to matched controls. Several instruments that can be used to assess prosocial reasoning in adolescence are discussed which can assess these delays. In addition a new measure developed by the author and relevant research regarding it is also presented from six publications. The instrument, the Prosocial Reasoning Outcomes (PRO), is discussed regarding the relevant theory and research connected with the measure, the content and structure of the instrument, scoring, and interpretation. Clinical examples will be presented regarding treatment planning, and litigation issues. The clinical as well as policy implications of this instrument will be discussed. For example, if deficits in prosocial reasoning are identified, there are several evidence-based programs which can remediate these deficits, such as Aggression Replacement Training and Thinking for a Change. Also an emergent issue in California is the use of assessments of prosocial reasoning in "transfer hearings," that is whether a youth will be tried as a juvenile or adult. The utility of the PRO instrument will be discussed regarding this emergent legal issue. For example, if developmental delays can be documented in JwSO's, and if these delays in prosocial reasoning plausibly contributed to the offending, and these delays can be remediated with appropriate treatment, that suggests these youth may be more appropriately adjudicated in the juvenile justice system.

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