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Assessing and Treating Risk of Nonsexual Recidivism in Juveniles Who Sexually Offended

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Historically treatment for JwSO has focused on aspects connected with sexual recidivism, and properly so. Caldwell's research (2016) indicates that nonsexual recidivism for juveniles who have sexually offended is 10 times that of sexual recidivism (2.75% vs. 27.25%). The paper will present relevant research and clinical experience regarding treating nonsexual recidivism in juveniles who sexually offended (JwSO).

Psychosocial Maturity and Criminal Behavior

In Canadian data, 17 is the age of highest incidence of those accused of property crimes, and age 13 likewise the age of highest incident of those accused of sexual crimes against children (Statistics Canada, 2016). These ages are "humps" in these curves and crime rates decline significantly after these ages. Steinberg, Cauffman, and Monahan (2015) studied 1,300 serious juvenile offenders for seven years after conviction. Less than 10 percent of the sample could be characterized as chronic offenders. Even for juveniles who were high-frequency offenders at the beginning of the study, the majority stopped offending by age 25. They developed a measure of psychosocial maturity which included impulse and aggression control, consideration of others, future orientation, personal responsibility, and resistance to peer influences which increased through all subgroups through age 25, consistent with current research regarding brain maturity (Steinberg, 2015). Less mature individuals were more likely to be persistent offenders, and even high-frequency offenders who psychosocially mature were more likely to desist from criminal behaviors.

Cauffman, Skeem, Dmitrieva, and Cavanagh (2016) studied 202 male juvenile offenders and 134 male adult offenders, all in secure detention facilities using appropriate versions of the Hare Psychopathy Checklist. A measure of psychosocial maturity was also used. They found that there was a greater risk of exaggerating psychopathic traits with juveniles compared to adults. They noted that 37% of juveniles who met the cut score for psychopathy continued to meet this criterion two years later compared to 53% of adults. False positive errors appeared to be more common among the youngest and least psychosocially mature juveniles. Increased psychosocial maturity, in turn, predicted decreased psychopathy scores in adolescents but not adults. Related research is regarding moral reasoning and delinquency by Ferriz Romeral, Sobral Fernández, and Gómez Fragueta (2018). They conducted a meta-analytic analysis of 72 studies regarding the relationship between moral reasoning and juvenile criminal behavior and found a moderate positive effect size ($d=.662$) which was larger for older adolescents and females.

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Methods to promote psychosocial maturity

There are treatment methods associated with increasing psychosocial maturity in juvenile probation populations. Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) promotes moral reasoning for juveniles (Little & Robinson, 1988). Two studies (Burnette, et al., 2003; Burnette, et al., 2004) showed positive changes with youth on probation using MRT, including increases in the level of moral reasoning. Brown (2016) using a sample of 86 juvenile offenders in Colorado found that juveniles who completed MRT treatment were 3.89 times less likely to re-offend compared to non-completers. Aggression Replacement Training (ART) (Goldstein, Glick, & Gibbs, 1998) is another treatment method with significant research which promotes prosocial maturity in probation youth. It has three modules promoting social skills, moral reasoning, and anger control. Its effectiveness with juveniles on probation has been described in research studies (Goldstein, Nensén, Daleflod, & Kalt, 2005). Amendola and Oliver (2010) note that ART is a "Model Program" for the United States Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the United Kingdom Home Office. Also, Ralph (2015a; 2015b) in three studies with ART with JwSO found beneficial outcomes on psychological measures.

A meta-analysis and review of effective practices for juveniles on probation was done by Lipsey (2009). He notes that the most effective methods associated with reduced recidivism for probation youth in rank order are approaches which utilize: 1. Counseling, 2. Skill building, 3. Multiple wrap-around services, 4. Restorative justice methods, and 5. Surveillance (structured probation supervision). The approaches that used counseling and skill building can be characterized as promoting psychosocial maturity. A subsequent article by Kettrey & Lipsey (2018) suggested that best practices for treatment of JwSO should include interventions for the general probation population. While treatment in the eight studies reviewed was associated with reduced sexual recidivism, the effect was not statistically significant, though there was a significant treatment effect for decreased general recidivism.

Two studies by the author using a prosocial skills training workbook (Ralph, 2016; Ralph, 2019) used outcome measures of psychosocial maturity. In both studies, an instrument rating prosocial behaviors of adolescents completed by counselors was used before and after treatment. Total scores for the instrument showed statistically significant gains in prosocial characteristics in both studies. An item analysis of statistically significant showed changes in the following areas: 1. Cooperation with adults and rules, 2. Improved emotional control and regulation, 3. Resisting peer pressure, and 4. Planning and thinking ahead.

Discussion

The above review suggests that the "other" recidivism to be targeted with JwSO is nonsexual recidivism which in the Caldwell (2016) study was 10 times the rate of sexual recidivism (27.25% vs 2.75%). Also, Steinberg, Cauffman, and Monahan's (2015) research indicated that declines in recidivism were associated with psychosocial maturity. Treatment approaches with significant research are available to promote prosocial maturity. Interventions to promote psychosocial maturity are cost-effective and can be readily implemented in most programs (Ralph, 2017b). Steinberg (2015) titles his book

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The Age of Opportunity indicating adolescence is a critical period to develop prosocial attitudes and behaviors that will help with better life functioning and achievement, and this is especially true for probation youth generally and also JwSO.

Learning Goals:

Participants will be able to:

- Identify an estimate for nonsexual recidivism rates for juveniles who sexually offended
- Identify the relation of psychosocial maturity to total recidivism in probation youth: positive or negative?
- Identify one treatment approaches to increase psychosocial maturity for probation youth.
- Identify if there a relationship between brain maturity and recidivism for probation youth.

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