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2019 ATSA Conference | Thursday November 7 | 3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

T-50

Assessing Adolescent Risk

Risk Assessment Tools and Protective Factors Among Adolescent Males with Sexual Offenses: “Specialist” vs. “Generalist” Distinction

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Although considerable progress has been made in the past decade regarding the assessment of youth justice-involved adolescents’ risk of criminal reoffending, there remain a number of focused areas in which progress has not kept pace. One concerns purported protective factors. Such factors may have a main effect (that is, predict desistance from crime). Some may interact with a known risk factor, weakening its association with recidivism. Another area in need of additional empirical attention concerns the distinction between those who are involved in the criminal justice system as a result of sexual crimes exclusively (“specialist”) versus those who have been involved for both sexual and nonsexual criminal behavior (“generalist”).

In this presentation, we will report on an investigation of the predictive validity of assessment tools, including the Juvenile Sex Offender Assessment Protocol II (J-SOAP-II), the Estimate of Risk of Adolescent Sexual Offense Recidivism (ERASOR), the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY), the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI), and the Desistance for Adolescents who Sexually Harm (DASH-13) using a sample of more than 400 male adolescents referred over a 20+ year period to specialized services for youth with sexual offenses in a major urban area in Southern Ontario. Comparative analyses with specialist and generalist groups within the sample will be reported. The tools were coded (blind to criminal records follow-up information) from archived case files, and official criminal records information was obtained, with an average follow-up period of 10 years. Additional analyses to be undertaken will determine if there are main and interaction effects of the protective factors included in the SAVRY and YLS/CMI and comprising the DASH-13 in the specialist and generalist groups. The findings from this study will contribute to the sparse literature on recidivism versus desistance among specialist and generalist groupings of youth justice-involved adolescents, with potential applied implications for assessment work and intervention planning.

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Learning Goals:

- Describe the recent developments in the assessment of purported protective factors
- Illustrate the role of purported protective factors in assessment work with specialist versus generalist groupings of adolescents with sexual offenses
- Outline the implications of assessing risk and protective factors with these groupings in terms of theory and practice

James R. Worling, Ph.D., C.Psych. is a clinical and forensic psychologist in full-time private practice who has worked extensively with adolescents who have sexually offended, and their families, since 1988. He has also works with children and adolescents who have been sexually abused and with children under 12 who have engaged in harming sexual behaviours. Dr. Worling has presented many workshops locally and internationally, and he has written a number of professional articles and book chapters regarding the etiology, assessment, and treatment of adolescent sexual aggression. Dr. Worling is a fellow of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual abusers, and he serves on the editorial board for their journal, *Sexual Abuse*.

Calvin M. Langton, Ph.D., C.Psych. is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Windsor, Canada. He is registered as a clinical and forensic psychologist in Ontario and is also a chartered psychologist in the UK. He works with children, adolescents, and adults. His research program focuses on applied and theoretical issues relevant to personality disorders, the causes and correlates of sexually exploitative and assaultive behaviors, risk and protective factors for types of interpersonal aggression, and various assessment and treatment issues with adolescents involved in the youth justice and children's mental health systems as well as adults in the correctional and forensic mental health systems. Dr. Langton serves on the editorial boards of the journals, *Sexual Abuse* and *Criminal Justice and Behavior*.

SHAPING THE FUTURE

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Combining Scores and Creating Risk Categories for the J-SOAP-II and JSORRAT-II

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Currently, little empirically-supported advice exists for professionals working with juveniles who have sexually offended (JSOs) on how to interpret and communicate the results of some of the more widely used sexual recidivism risk assessments. For example, risk tiers, though sometimes used, are not defined for some tools or idiosyncratically applied in the absence of that guidance. In addition, though professionals often use risk assessments in combination with each other, there are no standards for how to combine scores into a meaningful statement on risk. The current study aimed to derive empirically- and conceptually-informed risk tiers for two widely used risk assessment tools for JSOs, the *Juvenile-Sex Offender Assessment Protocol II* (J-SOAP-II; Prentky & Righthand, 2003) and the *Juvenile Sexual Offense Recidivism Risk Assessment Tool-II* (JSORRAT-II; Epperson & Ralston, 2015). It additionally sought to identify data-driven strategies for how to combine those tools to optimize prediction of sexual recidivism amongst JSOs. The study is based on J-SOAP-II and JSORRAT-II scores and sexual recidivism data from a sample of 1731 juveniles adjudicated guilty of a sexual offense and representing an exhaustive sample of JSOs from two states at three different points in time.

To find meaningful risk categories for the two tools this study followed the approach of the Council of State Governments Justice Center and adapted by Hanson and colleagues (2017) for the Static-99R and Static-2002R. The five levels of risk that their study developed are meaningfully distinct on criminogenic needs present, degree of recommended intervention, and predicted rate of sexual recidivism. In addition to their scheme, four other schemes were developed based conceptually on the first scheme. These schemes for risk categorization were tested using the Area Under the Receiver-Operating Curve (AUC) statistic and “discrepancies” analysis (the degree to which non-adjacent categories overlap on conceptually and theoretically important risk-related variables). One of the resulting five schemes emerged as optimal for the J-SOAP-II (and subscales 1 and 2) and the JSORRAT-II.

This study also aimed to find the predictive and incremental validity of these tools, as well as to evaluate how to best to combine the tools both statistically and practically. Predictive validity for the tools was analyzed using discrimination and calibration. Discrimination was found using the AUC statistic and the Delong method for assessing statistically significant differences amongst AUCs. Calibration was assessed using the E/O statistic (Hanson, 2016). This study also explored additional ways the E/O statistic could be calculated, each providing a different type of calibration-relevant information. Incremental validity and the combination of tools was evaluated following the approach of Babchishin and colleagues’s (2012). Incremental validity was found for predictions of juvenile sexual recidivism using Cox regressions and logistic regression for non-sexual violent recidivism.

SHAPING THE FUTURE

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Taking the lower of the scores, after scores were standardized using the log of the hazard ratios associated with scores centered on the median value, resulted in the highest indices of predictive validity.

From these results two practical tools were developed. First, statistically and conceptually-informed risk tiers associated with the JSORRAT-II, J-SOAP-II static scale, and the Sexual Drive/Preoccupation and Antisocial History subscales of the J-SOAP-II were generated. The second is a chart for the practical combination of the scores from both tools that make it easier for professionals working with JSOs who use these tools. This chart is based on predicted probabilities and relative risk ratios of the two risk assessment tools used in this study and informed by the results of the incremental validity component of this study.

References

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Learning Goals

- Attendees will understand the best ways in which to meaningfully categorize scores on the J-SOAP-II and JSORRAT-II into conceptually and statistically-informed risk tiers.
- Attendees will understand the predictive and incremental validity of the J-SOAP-II and JSORRAT-II and how that informs their combined use.
- Attendees will understand how to best combine risk assessment tools and how to practically use the chart for combining the J-SOAP-II and JSORRAT-II.

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