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Group Social Skills Intervention for Adolescents with Illegal Sexual Behavior

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Adolescents adjudicated for illegal sexual behavior (AISB) often display significant social deficits, peer rejection, and low social competence when compared to adolescents who have been adjudicated for other, non-sex crimes (Seto & Lalumiere, 2010). As such, treatment providers working with these populations are encouraged to deliver evidence-based services designed to develop and maintain prosocial relationships with age-appropriate friends (ATSA Practice Guidelines, 2017). Yet, very few empirical studies exist investigating effective social skills interventions for this population.

The present study examines the treatment outcomes for a group intervention to improve social skills in a sample of AISB at a high security juvenile correctional facility. An abbreviated, 9-week version of the UCLA PEERS Program (Laugeson, 2017) was created for use with the study. The 9-week format was needed to accommodate the educational and activities calendar at the juvenile correctional facility. The intervention was delivered in a group setting using the CBT-techniques identified in the PEERS manual such as didactic psychoeducation lessons, role-play demonstrations, behavioral rehearsal exercises, and performance feedback, to list a few. Participants were given pre- and post-intervention evaluations including the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS; Gresham & Elliott, 2007), the Test of Young Adult Social Skills Knowledge (TYASSK; Laugeson, 2017), and a qualitative post-intervention survey. Data collection is still ongoing for this study. Preliminary analyses from 2 rounds of data collection indicate significant treatment gains from pre- to post-intervention on several SSIS scales and positive results on the TYASSK. Treatment providers will present data from qualitative analysis to discuss feasibility and lessons learned from providing this type of group intervention in a juvenile correctional setting, a setting which is considered non-normative. Treatment implications and future research will be discussed.

Kelli R. Thompson is an Assistant Research Professor and Director of the Juvenile Delinquency Lab in the Department of Psychology at Auburn University. Her current research interests include the developmental pathways of delinquent behavior and the assessment, treatment-related outcomes and public policy issues facing justice-involved youth.

Rachael Estes received her BA in Psychology from Auburn University in 2012 and her MS in Clinical Psychology from Auburn University-Montgomery in 2015. She is currently a second year graduate student in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program at Auburn University and is a BRACE Fellow. Research interests include mindfulness' impact on emotion regulation in at-risk youth specifically adjudicated youth, and mindfulness practice and its effect on emotion regulation in lower elementary aged youth.