A Replication of a Prosocial Reasoning Intervention for Juveniles

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Aim/Background: A replication of a prior validation study was conducted using a workbook and relationship-based intervention which targeted prosocial reasoning in juveniles who sexually offended.

Material/Methods: The study sample consisted of 14 males all in residential treatment for sexual offenses. The average age was 16.4. The ethnic breakdown was Hispanic 36%, Black 29%, White 29%, and Other 7%. Three counselor rating scales were used to assess outcomes. A pre/post test design was used. The intervention required training in the treatment method for counselors and was completed in approximately 10 individual sessions.

The treatment model used incorporated Lipsey's criteria, and also the literature on program fidelity, and was described as "Evidence-based Program Characteristics" (EBPC) (Ralph, 2017). Factors in that model associated with positive program outcomes were:
1. Approaches that targeted social skills, problem-solving, and counseling.
2. Treatments which are manualized to reliably implement the model.
3. Training and supervision to promote fidelity to the model.
4. Fidelity checks which are "baked in" and part of a model.
5. Reliable pre/post outcome measures to assess treatment effectiveness.

Research has identified delays in prosocial reasoning as a modifiable criminogenic risk factor for delinquent behavior generally and also for sexually harmful behaviors. The treatment model was designed to give youth the tools to development prosocial reasoning by:
1. A workbook-based intervention that had youth generate more effective prosocial options to every day problem situation.
2. A counseling relationship that provided a prosocial role model in the counseling relationship.

Individuals had to complete and Internet-based training for the intervention which required that individuals demonstrate adequate proficiency.

Results: A multivariate analyses found statistically significant pre to posttest changes on all three counselor rating scales in a prosocial direction. These can be summarized as improvements in: 1. Cooperation with adults and rules, 2. Emotional control and regulation, 3. Resisting peer pressure, and 4. Planning and thinking ahead. While exploratory, this list may be useful in understanding concretely what changes can be observed regarding prosocial development of probation youth generally, and JwSO particularly, as a result of treatment.

Conclusions: This study was a replication of a prior validation study, and consistent with the hypothesis that the workbook and relationship-based intervention was related to positive changes in prosocial behaviors. Replication of the results using more rigorous methodologies to rule out rival hypotheses is appropriate.

Dr. Ralph is a clinical psychologist at the Juvenile Justice Center in San Francisco, Coordinator of the Juvenile Sexual Responsibility Program and Coordinator for the Juvenile Court Alienist Panel. Dr. Ralph is also a psychiatric epidemiologist and neuropsychologist, who has authored over 40 publications including articles, book chapters, blogs, or books. He was formerly Associate Clinical Professor in Family Practice, University of California School of Medicine at Davis, and Lecturer and Research Biostatistician in the Program in Maternal and Child Health, School of Public Health, at the University of California, Berkeley. He is a Trainer for Aggression Replacement Training, through the California Institute for Mental Health. He is certified as a practitioner for Moral Reconation Therapy. He is a certified trainer for the Juvenile Sexual Offense Recidivism Risk Assessment Tool-II for the California Sex Offender Management Board. He is a member of the Quality Management Committee, AllCare Independent Physicians Association.