Maximizing the Impact of Juvenile Justice Interventions: The Importance of Risk/Needs Assessment

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Key Points: Screening vs. Assessment

**Screening**
- Short; used with every youth in an intake-type setting
- Identifies youths who might have the characteristic in question (e.g., mental health problem)
- Sorts youth into categories, to...
  - Provide need for immediate attention (detention)
  - Help decide need for a more individualized assessment

**Assessment**
- Follow-up on youth “screened in” to make decisions about individualized need for interventions
Key Points

- Screening tools and assessment instruments were designed for use with *specific* populations for *specific* purposes
- A “one size fits all” tool does **not** exist
- The appropriate tool depends on the **decision point**
- Two types of risk tools: Brief risk assessment vs. comprehensive risk assessment tools
- Risk assessment ≠ mental health assessment
What is a Risk Assessment Tool?

- A risk for reoffending assessment tool is an instrument developed to help answer the question: “Is this youth at relatively low or relatively high risk for reoffending?”

- Some, but not all, risk assessment tools also address what is causing the youth to be at low or relatively high risk for reoffending (in other words, some identify crime-producing needs)
NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE AND IMPORTANCE OF RISK ASSESSMENT
There is emerging consensus on characteristics of effective programming for young offenders:

- Punitive sanctions do not have a significant effect on re-offending (Gatti et al., 2009).
- Most low-risk youth are unlikely to re-offend even if there is no intervention (Lipsey, 2009). But mixing them with high risk youth can make them worse.
- When services are matched to youth’s “crime-producing” (criminogenic) needs, the lower the chance of repeat offending.
- The goal is to have the right services for the right youth.
Results of Cost/Benefit Research: Benefits Per Dollar Invested

- For every $1.00 spent on the following services, you save:
  - Functional Family Therapy: $28.34
  - Multisystemic Family Therapy: $28.81
  - Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care: $43.70
  - Adolescent Diversion Project: $24.92
  - Juvenile Boot Camps: $0.81
  - Scared Straight: -$477.75 (NET LOSS)
The First Step is Valid Identification

- Risk assessment, if properly implemented, can identify youth at highest risk for re-offending and guide intervention efforts that could:
  - Prevent re-offending
  - Reduce risk of future harm among youth who have recently engaged in harmful aggressive behavior
  - Reduce costs to victims, service providers, and the juvenile justice system

- **Intervention** includes:
  - Placement/disposition decisions
  - Referral to appropriate services/programs
  - Monitoring/supervision level
Matching the Right Youth to the Right Interventions and Services

Risk Assessment

Diversion

Probation

Confine

Family Service

Substance Abuse treatment

Mental Health

Life Skills

Reduce Re-Arrest?
Potential for Case Management If Assessment is Implemented Properly (Vieira et al., 2009)

Match based on # of Services Given in Response to a Youth’s Criminogenic Needs
The Implementation Process is Crucial

- Staff Training on Risk Tool
- Building Policies
- Case Management - Service matrix - Case plans
- On-going Reassess & Data Tracking
Cost-Savings

- Proper implementation of a risk assessment can save costs by:
  - Reducing the number of costly assessments when they are not warranted,
  - Not recommending services for youth who do not need them,
  - Reducing costly out-of-home placement when it is unnecessary for addressing the risks and needs of the youth, and
  - Guiding case plans to reduce chances of re-offending.
IMPORTANT RISK ASSESSMENT CONCEPTS
Some Terms

- **Risk:** likelihood of future offending
- **Risk factor:** anything that increases the probability that a person will re-offend:
  - Static Risk Factors — do not change
  - Dynamic Risk Factors (criminogenic needs) — changeable, targets for services and intervention
- **Protective factor or strength:** decreases the potential harmful effect of a risk factor
- **Responsivity factor:** characteristics of the individual that can affect intervention success
Static Risk Factors

History of Antisocial Behavior

- Early Onset History of violence
- Early Onset History of arrests
- Past antisocial and official delinquent behavior
- Onset of Substance Use
Criminogenic Need/Dynamic Risk Factors

**Personality/Attitude** – (Largest Effects)
- Personality traits — Lacks Remorse, Lacks Empathy, CD/ODD
- Attention Deficit
- Impulsivity/Risk-Taking
- Antisocial Attitudes

**Family Factors**
- Inconsistent discipline – (large effect)
- Antisocial/criminal parents
Criminogenic Need Factors cont.

Substance Abuse
- If it has a direct effect on their criminal activity and is outside of the norm for adolescence

Poor School/Work Achievement

Antisocial Peers

Other Variables
- Past Intervention Failures, Availability of Services
- Parental Involvement
Elements of a Comprehensive Risk for Re-Offending Assessment

Evidence-Based Assessment

Static Risk Factors

Dynamic Risk Factors (criminogenic needs)

Protective or Responsivity Factors

Well-Being or Non-Criminogenic Needs
IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTAL CONCEPTS
General Principles of Risk in Youth

1. Aggression and delinquent activity are near normative
   - Roughly 6 in 10 males have a juvenile court record
   - Roughly 1 in 10 males have arrests for violent offenses
   - Self-reported aggression closer to 1 in 4 adolescent males

2. Risk can change across adolescence

3. Violent and delinquent behavior will desist for most youths during late adolescence/early adulthood
Offending Desists for Most Male Adolescents
(Reference group = Community males; Farrington, 1995; Loeber et al., 1991 Moffitt, 1993, Moffitt & Caspi, 2001)

Life-course persistent or Chronic Offenders
6% - 8%

Adolescent-Limited Offenders > 60%
Development Does Not Proceed Evenly Across Adolescence

- **Developmental Norm**
- **Jimmy**
- **Spurt**
- **Regression**
- **Delay**

A G E
Application of Developmental Concepts

- For JJ personnel and courts, these developmental facts make estimates of risk of future violence more difficult...
  - Risk assessments should be seen as having limited “shelf-life” for most youths (Grisso, 2004)
  - Tools should use a variety of evidence-based risk factors
  - Tools should include risk factors capable of change
  - Re-assessment is essential
HOW TO SELECT A RISK ASSESSMENT
How to Pick an Evidence-Based Risk Assessment Tool (Vincent et al., 2009)

- Purports to assess “risk” for re-offending
- Has a test manual
- Was developed for, or validated on, juvenile justice youth in the right setting
- Is feasible
- Permits re-assessment
- Demonstrates reliability - two independent raters would reach similar conclusions
- Demonstrates a strong relation to re-offending (predictive validity)
Illustration of Predictive Validity for Re-offending (SAVRY; Abramowitz & Gretton, 2002)
More About Validity

- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- Age
- Setting
  - Pre-adjudication
  - Probation
  - Institutional
Evidence-Based or Promising Comprehensive Risk Assessment Tools for Use Post-Adjudication

- **SAVRY** (Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth): Violence and general re-offending for ages 12-17.
- **YLS/CMI** (Youth Level of Services/Case Management Inventory): General re-offending for ages 12 – 17.
- **RRC** (Risk and Resiliency Checklist, aka SDRRC or LARRC): General re-offending.
- **WSJCA** (aka YASI or PACT): (Washington State Juvenile Court Assessment): General re-offending. Contains a pre-screen and an assessment.
What Risk Assessments Do NOT Do

- NOT prescriptive
- NOT appropriate for identifying risk for sexual offending
- NOT mental health assessments
  - They also do not identify potential mental health problems in need of an assessment
- Typically do NOT include items that are unrelated to future offending, like “well-being needs” (e.g., special education, depression, trauma)
SOME POINTS ABOUT IMPLEMENTATION: RISK FOR RE-OFFENDING VS. MENTAL HEALTH
Selection of the Risk Assessment is Dependent on the JJ Decision Point

- **Pre-adjudication:**
  - Brief Risk Assessment Tool
  - Comprehensive Risk Assessment not recommended without information-sharing agreements in place – potential for self-incrimination and risk to validity

- **Post-adjudication/Pre-disposition**
  - Ideal use for comprehensive risk assessment

- **Post-disposition**
  - Essential Use for comprehensive tool at admission and discharge

- **Re-entry or aftercare**
Relevant Assessment Points

Comprehensive Risk Assessment

Brief Risk Assessment

Intake

Adjudication

Disposition Hearing

Dismissed

Probation

Secure or Non-Secure Placement

Divert from Formal Processing
Screening Tools that May Accompany Risk Assessment

- **Mental Health Screening**
  - MAYSI-2

- **Trauma**
  - TSCC
  - UCLA PTSD

- **Substance Abuse Screening**
  - GAIN-SS
  - SASSI

- **Needs Screening (well-being needs)**
  - JIFF
Decision-making Model

- **Low Re-offense Risk**:
  - **MH/Subs Abuse**:
    - Divert w/MH or SA services
  - **Low**:
    - More intensive intervention w/MH or SA & RNR services
    - More intensive intervention w/RNR services
    - Divert with little to no intervention
Decision-making Model if Diversion not an Option

Lowest supervision w/services

More intensive intervention w/MH or SA & RNR services

Lowest supervision

More intensive intervention w/RNR services

MH/Subs Abuse

Re-offense Risk

Low

Low
Essential Steps of Implementation

- Clear policy
- Staff training and re-training
- Appropriate case plan format
- System for selecting service referrals
- Gathering and reporting data is essential to track:
  - Service provider & justice system accountability
  - Resource allocation
  - Youth and department progress
Summary: Benefits of Comprehensive Risk Assessments

- The “best” risk assessment tool for you depends on a variety of factors.
- Connecting youth to the appropriate interventions that target ONLY specific needs at the proper intensity may lead to:
  - Improved chance of reducing risk = reducing re-offending
  - Better use of services = improved youth functioning
  - Cost-Savings
- Gathering and reporting data is key.
- **Caveat:** The goals are unlikely to be attained without appropriate implementation.