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Combatting Sexual Offending and Victimization

- Sexual offenders and the crimes they commit have received considerable attention from policymakers, practitioners and the public in recent years.
- Widespread recognition that crime control strategies, including those targeting sexual offenders, are more likely to be effective when based on scientific evidence.
U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs (OJP) Role in Combatting Sexual Offending and Victimization

- Since 1996, OJP has sponsored more than 100 research projects, publications, and training curricula related to sexual assault and sex offender management
- Grant programs have provided funds to approximately 200 state, local, and tribal jurisdictions to enhance sex offender management
- Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking (SMART) Office:
  - Established in 2006
  - Provides assistance to criminal justice professionals around the entire spectrum of sex offender management activities
SMART Office Sex Offender Management Assessment and Planning Initiative

- Goal is to identify research-supported programs for replication across the U.S.
  - Inform OJP funding decisions concerning sex offender programming and research
- Assess the state of research and practice of sex offender management
  - Work conducted by subject-matter experts through NCJA
- Review of the literature on sexual offending and sex offender management
- National inventory of sex offender management professionals
- 2012 Discussion Forum involving national experts
SMART Office Sex Offender Management Assessment and Planning Initiative

Literature reviews on 8 adult and 5 juvenile topics

*Important to distinguish between adults and juveniles*

**Adult Topics**
- Incidence and prevalence
- Etiology
- Typologies
- Risk assessment
- Recidivism
- Internet offending
- Treatment effectiveness
- Management strategies

**Juvenile Topics**
- Etiology/typologies
- Risk assessment
- Recidivism
- Treatment effectiveness
- Registration and notification
SMART Office Sex Offender Management Assessment and Planning Initiative

- Key products:
  - Summaries of the research available online at: http://www.smart.gov/SOMAPI/index.html
  - Findings, policy implications, future research needs
  - Research briefs
  - Targeted conference presentations
  - Webinars
Literature Review Methods

- Source materials identified using abstract databases, internet searches, outreach to relevant organizations and subject matter experts
- Primarily studies conducted within the past 15 years
- Emphasis on individual studies that employed scientifically rigorous methods, as well as on synthesis studies – such as systematic reviews and meta-analyses
Part One:

Assessment of Risk for Sexual Re-Offense in Juveniles Who Commit Sexual Offenses
Introduction

Assessment of juvenile sexual recidivism risk serves several purposes, and can be administered at different points:

- During intake screening to guide authorities as to the appropriate course of action prior to or during adjudication.
- Upon post-adjudication to provide the authorities with information to be used in sentencing hearings and decision-making.
- In the treatment context to set a baseline assignment of risk, and periodically re-evaluate risk during the course of treatment.
Introduction

- In treatment, the risk assessment process can be used to determine the type and intensity of necessary treatment and define treatment and case management targets.
- Regardless of purpose, risk assessment is inherently difficult.
- It’s further complicated by low base rate of juvenile sexual recidivism.
- Juvenile risk assessment is even further complicated by adolescent development and maturation.
- Risk assessment models and tools need to account for these developmental factors in order to accurately estimate risk.
Introduction

- Nevertheless, the field of juvenile risk assessment has largely developed in its own right over the past decade.
- Contemporary juvenile risk assessment includes a focus on static and dynamic risk factors.
- Dynamic risk factors are particularly important when treatment is provided as these become the targets for treatment $^{3,4,5}$
Models of Risk Assessment

- Keep in mind:
  - Ongoing controversy in the field about the best risk assessment model and the capacity of instruments to accurately predict risk for sexual recidivism.
  - Existing knowledge base primarily based upon studies of average range IQ adolescent males.

- Two general models: actuarial and clinical model
  - Actuarial model. Risk estimate based on statistical comparison between the characteristics and past behavior of the individual and of known recidivists.
  - Clinical model. Risk estimate based on observation and professional judgment.
Models of Risk Assessment

- In contemporary applications of the clinical model, a structured risk assessment instrument is used to guide clinical judgment – structured or anchored clinical risk assessment.\(^6\)
- Unlike actuarial assessment, clinical risk assessment evaluates static and dynamic risk factors.
- Clinical model of risk assessment also sometimes assess protective factors that may decrease the risk for a sexual re-offense.
An extensive literature on risk factors for juvenile sexual offending.

As many as 101 different risk factors for juvenile sexually abusive have been described in the literature,¹² and this list continue to grow.

However, similar risk factors appear in the most frequently used juvenile risk assessment instruments.
Common Categories of Risk Factors for Juvenile Sexual Re-Offense

1. Sexual beliefs, attitudes, and drive
2. History of sexual offending behavior
3. History of personal victimization
4. History of general antisocial behavior
5. Social relationships and connection
6. Personal characteristics
7. General psychosocial functioning
8. Family relationships and functioning
9. General environmental conditions
10. Response to prior/current treatment

9
The Power of Multiple Risk Factors

- Casey and colleagues\textsuperscript{26} noted how difficult it is to clearly implicate in sexually coercive behavior any single risk factor in the absence of other potential risk factors.
- This highlights the role of multiple risk factors in contributing to juvenile sexual recidivism.
**Risk Factors for Juvenile Sexual Offending**

- However, findings regarding risk factors vary considerably and are inconsistent across different studies. \(^{10}\)
- Further, most the literature on risk factors is theoretical and descriptive, rather than empirical.
- Characterized by methodological problems and other limitations. \(^{10}\)
  - Short follow-up periods of less than 3 years.
  - Samples that are small in size.
  - Risk factors studied vary widely from one study to the next, selected by researchers based on their own clinical experience or the literature on adult sexual recidivism\(^{11}\)
Empirical Basis of Risk Factors for Juvenile Sexual Recidivism

- Most identified risk factors for juvenile sexual offending lack empirical validation.
- Worling & Långström\textsuperscript{13, 14}
  - Among 21 commonly cited risk factors, only five are empirically supported through at least two independent research studies.
  - Two “promising” factors that have empirical support in at least one study.
  - 14 factors that are either “possible” risk factors based on general clinical support, or “unlikely” as they that lack empirical support or contradicted by empirically derived evidence.
Empirical Basis of Risk Factors for Juvenile Sexual Recidivism

- However, the literature is fluid. It continues to change, but is mixed and inconsistent.
- Evidence exists to support, contradict, and/or add to Worling & Långström.
- Evidence currently exists to support 30 partially validated risk factors for adolescent sexual recidivism. 11, 13-23, 25
**Risk Factors for Sexual Recidivism: Summary and Conclusions**

- Research on risk factors for sexual recidivism is inconsistent and sometimes contradictory.
- It is disconnected and varied, with little to unify it.  
- It is also likely that risk factors operate differently in different people, and at different points in child and adolescent development.
- For instance, van der Put et al. found the effect of both static and dynamic risk factors on recidivism varied by the age of the adolescent.
- Although evolving, our knowledge is speculative and provisional at this point in time.
Empirical evidence remains weak and inconsistent.

It is likely that complex interactions among different risk factors are at play at different times in the development of children and adolescents.

Similarities found between risk factors that place juveniles at risk for sexual offending and those that place juveniles at risk for many other problem behaviors, including general delinquency, complicate matters even further.

More research is needed to identify, understand, and construct both static and dynamic risk variables linked specifically to juvenile sexual recidivism.
Juvenile Sexual Risk Assessment Instruments

- Risk assessment instruments provide a structured and anchored means for assigning risk.
- They define the risk assessment process and also the risk factors upon which the assessment is based and how these risk factors are to be assessed.
- There is some mild empirical support for the capacity of risk assessment instruments to identify statistically valid risk factors, as well as their predictive validity.
- However, it is not currently possible to definitively assert that any such instrument is empirically validated in terms of its capacity to accurately predict juvenile sexual recidivism.
Validation Studies of the Most Commonly Used Instruments

Most commonly used instruments in North America:

- Juvenile Sex Offender Assessment Protocol-II (J-SOAP-II)
- Estimate of Risk of Adolescent Sexual Offense Recidivism (ERASOR)
- These are structured, empirically informed instruments designed for clinical assessment.

Sole actuarial assessment instrument available is the Juvenile Sexual Offense Recidivism Risk Assessment Tool-II (JSORRAT-II), which is normed and avail for use only in limited locations.

None of these instruments have demonstrated strong or consistently supported predictive validity.
Inter-Rater Reliability

- There are always differences in opinions.
- For instance, the J-SOAP-II, ERASOR, and JSORRAT-II have each been generally reported to have inter-rater reliability. ¹¹, ²⁷-³²
- However, Vitacco and colleagues ³³ report an absence of well-designed and executed inter-rater reliability studies in the juvenile risk assessment field overall.
- They point out the need for studies across populations of juveniles in different treatment or supervision settings.
- Drawing firm conclusions about the predictive validity of juvenile risk assessment instruments is difficult.
**Predictive Validity**

- Relatively few validation studies of juvenile risk assessment instruments have been undertaken to date.
- Research examining predictive validity of juvenile instruments has produced inconsistent and contradictory findings.
- Some research has reviewed and compared multiple instruments, some of which are not intended nor designed to measure risk for juvenile sexual recidivism.
- Other research has reviewed and evaluated only a single instrument.
Predictive Validity

- Sometimes, research also reviews the capacity of juvenile sexual risk instruments to accurately predict nonsexual recidivism, although none of the juvenile risk assessment instruments currently available for use in the field are designed for that purpose.

- Little consistency across validation studies in terms of:
  - the recidivism definition employed
  - the time period studied
  - the selection of the sample/cohort
  - the study design itself
  - the ways in which statistics are applied and/or interpreted
Empirical State of Juvenile Risk Assessment Instruments

- There are no currently well-validated risk assessment instruments for the prediction of sexual recidivism among juvenile sexual offenders.\(^{31, 34}\)
- Juvenile risk assessment instruments do not perform in a manner that provides confidence regarding their ability to predict juvenile sexual recidivism.\(^{33}\)
- Independent research has produced inconsistent and poor results for the J-SOAP-II, ERASOR, and JSORRAT-II in predicting either sexual or general (sexual and non-sexual) recidivism, and especially for the prediction of sexual recidivism.\(^{22}\)
“At this time, research does not support the use of any of the specialized juvenile risk assessment instruments due to inconsistent and overall limited predictive validity; no instruments have yet emerged as an empirically validated approach to juvenile sexual risk assessment. “

-Caldwell, Ziemke, & Vitacco 28
Protective Factors in Juvenile Risk Assessment

- Risk factors are the foundation of virtually all risk assessment instruments.
- More recent attention given to protective factors and their role in mitigating the effects of risk factors.
- Protective factors have been described in the child and adolescent development literature, and their role in delinquency prevention has long been recognized.
- However, the appearance of protective factors in the forensic literature is new.
- It is not clear which protective factors are most significant or how to evaluate their function and role in the process of evaluating and treating juvenile sexual risk.
Conclusion: What Have We Learned?

- Research about risk factors and risk assessment instruments still in its infancy.
- However, studies have provided important insights.
- First, the range of risk factors for juvenile sexual offending behavior and recidivism is relatively well defined. The *types and classes* of factors that place youth at risk have been identified.
- Second, current risk assessment instruments are far from empirically validated, making it difficult to conclude with any degree of confidence that the instruments are scientifically valid.
  - The evidence concerning the predictive accuracy of various instruments is mixed, inconsistent, and contradictory.
Conclusion: What Have We Learned?

- Third, there is a clear need for juvenile risk assessment instruments and processes to focus on estimates of short-term rather than long-term risk. 24, 33, 36
  - However, the adoption of a short-term assessment model will likely mean that the manner in which juvenile risk instruments are used and researched will have to significantly change.

- Fourth, regardless of instrument strength, sound risk assessment requires well-trained risk evaluators who do not simply rely on risk scores when making decisions and especially those with potentially lifelong consequences.
  - Evaluators must understand strengths and limitations of current instruments, including lack of empirical evidence.
**Conclusion: What Have We Learned?**

- **Fifth**, risk instruments must be integrated into a comprehensive assessment process. They play an important role in the process, but more so for case management and treatment than their accuracy in predicting risk.
  - The role risk instruments play in identifying dynamic risk is especially important, as these are targets for treatment.
  - Equally important is their role in identifying protective factors, that may also be the targets of a strength-based treatment.
Conclusion: What Have We Learned?

- Sixth. Broad and life transforming decisions about juveniles with sexually abusive behavior should be made only in the context of comprehensive psychosocial assessments, and not based on the use of a risk assessment instrument alone.
  - Social and legal policies should not hinge on the result of any juvenile risk assessment instrument at this time.
Epilogue

- Research continues to evolve. New material will augment or outdate current material in three to ten years.
- Funding needed to establish empirical validity and reliability, for independent and replicated studies is needed.
- Need for better instruments.
- Need for better trained evaluators.
- In the meantime, juvenile risk instruments are valuable tools for case formulation, treatment planning, and case management.
Notes


Notes


16 Van der Put, C.E., van Vugt, E.S., Stams, G.J.J.M, Deković, M., & van der Laan, P.H. (2013). Differences in the prevalence and impact of risk factors for general recidivism between different types of juveniles who have committed sexual offenses (JSOs) and juveniles who have committed nonsexual offenses (NSOs). *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, 25*, 41-68.


Notes


Notes


References


References

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Part Two:

Recidivism of Juveniles who Commit Sexual Offenses
**Historical Perspective**

- Prior to 1980s: Viewed as “boys will be boys”
- 1980s: Retrospective interviews of adults indicated onset as juvenile
  - More focus on juveniles utilizing adult models
  - Assumed today’s juveniles are tomorrow’s adults
Historical Perspective

- Since the 1980s, have learned more about this population
- Characteristics and propensity to reoffend
- Research studies on rates and patterns of recidivism
Summary of Research Findings
Research Studies

- Single studies on group of juveniles
- Meta-analyses examine multiple studies to draw conclusion on particular issue (e.g., recidivism)
  - Overcome challenges of small sample sizes
  - Use of different recidivism measures and follow-up periods
Historical Studies of Adult Sex Offenders: Sex History Interviews

- Retrospective studies report unidentified history of juvenile sexual offending\(^1\)
- Viewed juveniles as budding adult sex offenders; similar to them
- Didn’t have prospective recidivism data on juveniles’ likelihood to continue offending as adults
Prospective National Youth Sample

- Longitudinal study began in 1976
- N = 1,725 youth who were then 11-17
- 1992 survey wave
  - 6% committed a sexual assault (3% arrested)
  - 2% committed a serious sexual assault (2 or more sexual assaults) (10% arrested)
- Sexual assaulters - 58% sexual recidivism including 10% as adults
- Serious sexual assaulters – 78% sexual recidivism including 17% as adults
- 99% general recidivism rate for sex assaulters

\[^2\]
Large Scale Systematic Reviews, Including Meta-Analyses

- 79 studies from 1943-96
  - 5% sexual recidivism for 1 year follow-up studies
  - 22% sexual recidivism for 3 year follow-up studies
  - 7% sexual recidivism for 5 year follow-up studies

- 9 studies (n = 2,986)
  - 59 month follow-up
  - Recidivism (13% sexual, 25% non-sex violent, 29% non-sex, non-violent)
Large Scale Systematic Reviews, Including Meta-Analyses

- 63 studies (n = 11,219)
  - Mean follow-up 59 months
  - 7% mean sexual recidivism rate
  - 43% mean general recidivism rate
Single Studies

- Institutional vs. community-based
- Rape vs. child molestation offenses
- Sex-only (specialists) vs. sex and non-sex offenses (generalists)
- Sex vs. non-sex offenses
Research Limitations and Future Needs
Research Limitations

- Small # of studies
- Small sample sizes
- Under-reporting of sex crimes
- Short timeframes
- Measurement variations across studies
- Missing information about the characteristics of the sample studied and the intervention study subjects received
Research Needs

- Studies producing more comparable findings
- Longer follow-up periods including as adults
- Comparison of different types of juveniles
- Research on juvenile females
- Policy-relevant research
Conclusions and Policy Implications
Conclusions

- Observed sexual recidivism rates range from 7-13% over 5 years
- Recidivism rates are generally lower for juveniles than adults
- Small % of juveniles will sexually reoffender as adults (research shows significant differences in populations)
- Higher general than sexual recidivism
Conclusions

- Don’t label juveniles sex offenders for life
- Evaluate policy impact on recidivism and iatrogenic effect
- Interventions should be individualized based on risk and need
- Focus on general and sexual recidivism
- Don’t automatically use adult policies on juveniles – need evidence to implement
Notes


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Q & A

To submit questions for the presenters please use the chat feature on the right hand side of your screen. Please select **Host and Presenter**
Q & A

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Thank You for Joining Us!

Please join us for the next webinar in this series on June 1, 2015
The topic will be Juvenile Treatment

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