Maximizing the Impact of Interventions for Youth: The Importance of Risk/Needs Assessment

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Key Points

- Use of a **valid** risk/needs assessment instrument at certain points in the juvenile justice process can:
  - Improve youth outcomes by promoting positive development,
  - Conserve resources by improving service decisions,
  - Decrease rates of youth confinement, and
  - Improve public safety

- Quality implementation and buy-in from stakeholders is crucial for success
What is a Risk Assessment Tool?

- **Risk** = risk for serious delinquent or violent offending

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

- Some, also address “What is possibly causing the youth to be at low or relatively high risk for reoffending?”
Risk Assessment Comes in Different Forms

- Depends on the purpose of the tool and the decision-point where it is used.....
  - Pretrial detention decisions
  - Institutional classification
  - Dispositional and case planning
Example of a Risk/Needs Assessment

24 Risk Items
- 10 Static
- 14 Dynamic
+ 6 Protective Items

Items rated a on 3-pt scale using interview + all available info
Example of a Risk/Needs Assessment

42 Risk Items
8 Domains
- Family
- Attitude/orientation

+ Strengths

Items rated present/absent using interview
+ all available info
WHY IS RISK ASSESSMENT IMPORTANT?
NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE
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).
- Mixing low-risk youth with more delinquent youth can make them worse (42% in group prevention programs & 22% in probation programs) (Lipsey, 2006).
- When services are matched to youth’s level of risk and their “delinquency-producing” (criminogenic) needs, the lower the chance of offending.
- The goal is to have the right services for the right youth.
Matching the Right Youth to the Right Interventions and Services

- Risk Assessment
- Diversion
- Probation
- Confine

Services:
- Family Services
- Substance Abuse Treatment
- Mental Health
- Life Skills

Reduce Re-Arrest?
For every $1.00 spent on the following services, taxpayers 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)
Matching Youth to Services Based on Delinquency-Producing Needs = Reduction in Reoffending

(Vieira et al., 2009)

Match based on # of Services Given in Response to a Youth’s Criminogenic Needs
Risk Assessments Should be Valid or “Evidence-Based” (Vincent et al., 2009)

- Has a manual
- Demonstrates **reliability** - two independent raters would reach similar conclusions
- Was developed for, or validated on, the right type of juvenile justice youth (gender, race, etc) in the right setting (pre-adjudication, probation, etc)
- Demonstrates a strong relation to re-offending (research refers to this as **predictive validity**)

Vincent et al., 2009
WHAT CAN IT DO FOR YOU IF IMPLEMENTED PROPERLY?
Dispositions Before Implementation of a Risk Assessment

- Informal
- Probation
- Detention
- Corrections

**Pre-SAVRY**
Increase in use of probation

Informal | Pre-SAVRY | Post-SAVRY
---|---|---
Detention | OR = 0.39 | OR = 2.69
OJJ commit | OR = 0.39 |
Out-of-Home Placement Rates Before Pre-SAVRY
Decrease in Placement Rates After Risk Assessment Implemented

- Any placement during study
  - Pre-SAVRY: OR = 0.56
  - Post-SAVRY: OR = 0.37

- Placed immediately after disposition
  - Pre-SAVRY
  - Post-SAVRY
Increase in Use of Community Services for High Risk Youth – Decrease for Low Risk

![Bar chart showing mean number of services attended for low, medium, and high risk youth in referrals and completed services.](chart.png)

- **p < .01**
No Change in Recidivism

- Non-Violent
- Violent
- Violations

Pre-SAVRY
Post-SAVRY
QUALITY IMPLEMENTATION AND BUY-IN IS ESSENTIAL
The Implementation Process is Crucial

Obtain Buy-In
Select Tool & Build Policies
Train Staff Case Management
On-going Reassess & Data Tracking
Services Attended
Before and After Good Implementation

Mean # Services Attended

Low
Moderate
High

Pre-Imp
Post-Imp
Change in Placement Rates Before and After Implementation — no Judge Buy-In

- Any placement during study
- Right after referral or dispo
SO....TO REVIEW
GOOD IMPLEMENTATION OF A
RISK ASSESSMENT
CAN LEAD TO....
Increase in use of probation

- OR = 2.69
- OR = 0.39

Categories:
- Informal
- Probation
- Detention
- OJJ commit

Pre-SAVRY
Post-SAVRY
Decrease in Placement Rates After Risk Assessment Implemented

Pre-SAVRY
Post-SAVRY

OR = 0.56
OR = 0.37

Any placement during study
Placed immediately after disposition
Increase in Use of Community Services for High Risk Youth

$p < .01$
No Change in Recidivism
Conclusions

- JJ systems should adopt valid risk assessment tools.

- Risk assessment tools can conserve resources and improve outcomes for youth, while decreasing confinement rates and still protecting public safety.

- Without quality implementation, the benefits will not be realized.