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By David Prescott and Alisa Klein

"The Influence of Age and Sexual Drive on the Predictive Validity of the Juvenile Sex Offender Assessment Protocol– Revised"

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THE QUESTIONS

Does the most widely-used juvenile sexual offense recidivism risk assessment tool, the Juvenile Sex Offender Assessment Protocol–Revised (J-SOAP-II), accurately predict recidivism among male adolescents who have perpetrated sexual harm? Do age and sexual drive have a moderating effect on the predictive validity for sexual recidivism of the J-SOAP-II?

THE RESEARCH

The J-SOAP-II is commonly used to gauge risk of re-offense and inform decisions regarding the treatment and placement of male youth who have perpetrated sexual harm. To date, 15 studies have examined the tool's predictive validity with mixed results, although the cause of this inconsistency remains unclear. One possibility is that due to the rapid cognitive, psychosocial, and sexual development that occurs during adolescence, a youth's maturation may impact the predictive validity of the JSOAP-II. Another is that the measurement of youths' sexual drive may be producing the inconsistency in the validity of the J-SOAP-II. As such, the authors, using a sample of 156 juveniles who have committed sexual offenses (JSOs), examined two characteristics of the J-SOAP-II for predictive validity:

- Age; and
- Sexual drive and preoccupation.

The 156 participants in the study were considered to have re-offended if they were arrested for a sexual charge, including non-contact offenses such as lewdness. Because sexual offenses can result in non-sexual offense convictions through plea bargaining, recidivism was determined on the basis of re-arrest rather than conviction. The predictive validity of the J-SOAP-II was compared across age and the presence or absence of heightened sexual drive.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The authors cite two significant results:

- The J-SOAP-II appeared to be a better predictor of sexual recidivism among adolescents ages 14 to 16 years old than for older adolescents aged 17-19 years; and
- The J-SOAP-II significantly predicted sexual recidivism for adolescents with a clear pattern of sexualized behavior, but not for those without such a pattern. Overall, the J-SOAP-II was a somewhat better predictor of sexual recidivism for JSOs with heightened sexual drive and, as such, may have greater clinical utility for JSOs with heightened sexual drive.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS

First, these findings illustrate the need for professionals to have a deep knowledge of the measures they use and the research that supports them. Like other measures of its kind, the J-SOAP-II is not simply a checklist of risk factors. Indeed, the instrument is described as a "protocol." These findings further demonstrate the need for professionals to be humble in how they communicate risk assessment findings; firstrate assessments openly note the limitations of risk assessment. Finally, these findings once again highlight the need to keep risk assessments of young people time-limited in order to prevent misuse of instruments such as the J-SOAP-II

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD

Once again, these findings highlight a basic fact about human beings: people change! Young people, in particular, are subject to change without notice. These changes can be physical, emotional, social, and involve neurological developments that bring improved decision-making and interpersonal skills. As much as our field craves predictive validity in our assessment measures, psychological maturation is itself unpredictable. However, as much as our field's attempts to develop risk assessment instruments for use in treatment and placement decisions has been a challenge, it is encouraging to see the numbers of studies involving J-SOAP-II that have been conducted by outside investigators. This prevents some sources of bias in the research process. Although no measure is as effective as its developers would like it to be, it is encouraging to see empirical study of these instruments continue.

ABSTRACT

The Juvenile Sex Offender Assessment Protocol–Revised (J-SOAP-II) is the most commonly used measure in the assessment of recidivism risk among juveniles who have committed sexual offenses (JSOs), but mixed support exists for its predictive validity. This study compared the predictive validity of the J-SOAP-II across two offender characteristics, age and sexual drive, in a

sample of 156 JSOs who had been discharged from a correctional facility or a residential treatment program. The J-SOAPII appeared to be a better predictor of sexual recidivism for younger JSOs (14-16 years old) than for older ones (17-19 years old), with significant differences found for the Dynamic Summary Scale and Scale III (Intervention). In addition, several of the measure's scales significantly predicted sexual recidivism for JSOs with a clear pattern of sexualized behavior but not for those without such a pattern, indicating that the J-SOAP-II may have greater clinical utility for JSOs with heightened sexual drive. The implications of these findings are discussed.

CITATION

Wijetunga, C., Martinez, R., Rosenfeld, B., and Cruise, K. (2018). The Influence of Age and Sexual Drive on the Predictive Validity of the Juvenile Sex Offender Assessment Protocol – Revised. International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 62(1) 150–169.