

Juvenile Justice Vision 20/20 Training Event
Nuts and Bolts: Using Assessment Information to Drive Treatment Planning
June 4, 2015
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Using structured risk/need assessments to drive treatment planning is a method of addressing delinquent behavior that is proven to be promising in meeting the needs of juveniles as well as in changing their outcomes. A risk assessment is a comprehensive examination and evaluation of both dynamic (changeable) and static (historical and/or demographic) factors that predict the risk of recidivism and provides guidance on services, placement, supervision, and disposition. A risk assessment is among many different types of assessments used in juvenile justice systems which also include needs assessments, mental health assessments, substance abuse assessments, sexual reactivity assessments, and trauma assessments.

A large body of research suggests a strong correlation between addressing criminogenic risk and reducing recidivism in juvenile offenders. A criminogenic risk is a factor that directly contributes to the offending behavior. Criminogenic risk assessments are important in identifying these risk factors because they are able to predict future criminal behavior as well as assist the juvenile justice professional in developing treatment strategies.

Risk assessments are able to assess risk in a variety of domains. These domains include aggression, alcohol and drug use, education, employment, family/living environment, juvenile justice history, mental health, peers and social supports, pro-social skills, and use of leisure time. Although these assessments can address all of these domains, they cannot predict risk for youth with significant mental health issues or predict risk for youth with sexual offending issues.

Counties and court systems in Michigan use a variety of different risk assessment tools. They include:

- YLS: Youth Level of Service, Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI)
- YASI: Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI)
- MJJAS: Michigan Juvenile Justice Assessment System (MJJAS)
- Juvenile Classification Assessment Report (DHHS-CAR)
- SAVRY: Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth
- JIFF: Juvenile Inventory for Functioning
- Youth COMPAS

Risk assessment information allows a juvenile justice professional to identify level of structure or security needed, domains with high risk scores, and types and dosages of treatment services. The high caseloads demanded of juvenile justice professionals require effective classification when using risk/need assessments. For example, the level of services given to a youth need to match their level of risk. For instance, more supervision, treatment resources, and intensive services are given to higher risk clients. Similarly, low risk clients require less resources and supervision.

In addition to risk assessments, needs assessments identify domains of strength and weakness as well as assist in developing an all-encompassing treatment plan. Interventions provided based off a needs

assessment should be evidence-based as well as have treatment hours (dosage) that reflect the juvenile's risk level. Treatment planning should include goals that are/do the following:

- Specific, measurable, and observable
- State who, what, where, when, and a time frame
- Stated in positive terms
- Target criminogenic risk factors and needs
- Updated at a minimum of every three months

Risk and needs assessments are great tools for juvenile justice professionals to use as they identify key risk factors in youth and help guide treatment planning in order to meet the needs of that individual. Many different risk/need assessments, including the MJJAS, have been developed in Michigan. Their effectiveness can be observed by the ability of court systems to develop treatment plans that reduce negative outcomes in youth.