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

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National Youth Screening & Assessment Project (NYSAP)

- Academics providing technical assistance for screening and assessment in juvenile justice systems
- Focus on
  - Risk of behavioral health problems and re-offending
  - Evidence-based practice
- Nationwide consultation services…
  - Tool selection and implementation
  - Staff training
  - System evaluation and outcome
- Headquarters for MAYSITM and MAYSIWARETM (mental health screening in JJ settings)
Three Key Points

- Use of a valid risk/needs assessment tool with most every youth is essential for Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare agencies

- Risk assessment helps states to conserve resources and to improve outcomes for youth

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

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

- 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, 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*)
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
Could it Have Been Prevented?

High risk for violence?

Pro-criminal attitudes
Poor anger control
Substance Abuse
Negative Peers
Manipulative

Low risk for violence?
WHY IS RISK ASSESSMENT IMPORTANT?
NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE
Research Evidence: Guiding Principles

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 antisocial 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 “crime-producing” (criminogenic) needs, the lower the chance of offending.
- The goal is to have the right services for the right youth.

- “Programs should be designed to reduce risks and develop competencies in youth that will prevent or reduce violent behavior”

- States should “utilize risk assessment mechanisms to aid JJ personnel in determining appropriate sanctions for delinquent behavior”
Adoption and Safe Families Act (1997)

- Stressed the use of assessments for safety and well-being

JJDPA

- “...represent communities that have a comprehensive plan designed to identify at-risk juveniles and to prevent or reduce the rate of juvenile delinquency, and that involve other entities operated by individuals who have a demonstrated history of involvement in activities designed to prevent juvenile delinquency;”
CONSERVE RESOURCES & IMPROVE OUTCOMES
Matching the Right Youth to the Right Juvenile Justice Interventions and Services

Risk Assessment
- Diversion
- Probation
- Confine

Reduce Re-Arrest?
- Family Services
- Substance Abuse Treatment
- Mental Health
- Life Skills
Benefits of Avoiding Incarceration of Youth Per Dollar Invested (Aos, 2006)

- 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)
Reduction in Recidivism by Matching Youth to Services Based on Crime-Producing Needs (Vieira et al., 2009)

Match based on # of Services Given in Response to a Youth’s Criminogenic Needs

% Re-offended

- Poor Match
- Med Match
- Good Match

Risk/Need
Proper Implementation of a Risk Assessment Tool Can Save Costs by.....

- Avoiding referrals to services for youth who **do not** need the services,
- Reducing costly out-of-home placement when it is unnecessary for addressing the risks and needs of the youth,
- Guiding case planning to reduce chances of re-offending and violence (or delinquency in general), and
- Still protecting public safety.
Risk Assessment Implementation in JJ Study
MacArthur Foundation (Vincent et al., 2011)

Dispositions Before Implementation of a Risk Assessment

- Informal
- Probation
- Detention
- Corrections

Pre-SAVRY

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<th>Dispositions</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>Informal</td>
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<td>Probation</td>
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Increase in use of probation

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<th>Pre-SAVRY</th>
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Decrease in Placement Rates After Risk Assessment Implemented

Any placement during study

Pre-SAVRY
Adj OR = 0.56
Post-SAVRY

Placed immediately after disposition

Pre-SAVRY
Adj OR = 0.41
Post-SAVRY
Increase in Use of Community Services for High Risk Youth – Decrease for Low Risk

Mean # Services Attended

Referrals

Completed

Low Risk
Med Risk
High Risk

p < .01
No Change in Recidivism

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- **Non-Violent**
- **Violent**

- **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

Pre-Imp
Post-Imp

Low
Moderate
High
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

Adj OR = 2.39
Pre-SAVRY
Post-SAVRY

Adj OR = .43

Adj OR = .40
Decrease in out-of-home placement

Any placement during study

Placed immediately after disposition

Pre-SAVRY

Post-SAVRY

Adj OR = 0.56

Adj OR = 0.41
Increase in Use of Community Services for High Risk Youth

Mean # Services Attended

Referrals

Completed

p < .01
And, no increase in recidivism
Conclusions

- Every state JJ system should adopt a valid risk assessment tool

- Conserves resources and improves outcomes for youth
  - Improved chance of reducing risk = reducing re-offending and violence or at least not increasing it
  - Better use of services = improved youth functioning
  - Cost Savings
  - Track data and measure outcomes

- Without quality implementation the benefits will not be realized