

Hoge, R. D. (2002). Standardized instruments for assessing risk and need in youthful offenders. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 29(4), 380-395.

Juvenile justice systems represent the best efforts of the society to control youth crime, address more basic personal and social needs of young people, and reflect the more basic values of the society. This article focuses on judgments about the risk and need levels of youthful offenders that form the basis for many decisions in the juvenile justice systems. First it is argued that the quality of the decisions depends directly on the validity of the judgments and then secondly that the quality of the judgments and decisions would be improved through the use of standardized assessment tools (Hoge, 2002).

Judicial decisions range all the way from the initial decision to arrest a youth to the disposition phase after a finding of guilty (Bartol & Bartol, 1998; Champion, 1998; Hoge, 2001; Krisberg & Howell, 1998; Melton, Petrila, Poythress, & Slobogin, 1997). Police, prosecutors, and youth court judges are key figures in these decisions but many other individuals are involved. Some addition figures in the judgments are psychologists, social workers, and probation officers. The decisions involving youth are always based on inferences or judgments, but can be guided by statutes, administrative guidelines, and operating procedures. Although there are some standards, it has been shown that considerable variability arises due to the lack of clear criteria in the procedures. It is important to recognize that some discretion is needed when dealing with the youth justice systems since the decisions need to be tailed to the individual needs of the client, but too much room allows for personal prejudices and biases to occur (Hoge, 2002).

Two of the most important inferences in working with juveniles are about their risks and their needs which influence many judicial decisions. When making inferences regarding risk, they represent predictions of future behavior. Criminogenic risk is the likelihood that an individual will engage in criminal activity in the future. Many factors are static and will not change over time (Hoge, 2002). Andrews, Bonta, and Hoge (1990) used the concept of risk principle of case classification to specify decisions regarding the level of supervision and intensity of services provided should be based on the level of criminogenic risk they display. This implies that the outcomes of interventions are most successful when they are geared toward the individual's risk level (Andrews et al., 1990; Lipsey & Wilson, 1998). While criminogenic risk is an important factor, there is an issue of what information should be used in forming the assessment, though agreement is seen in regards to the major classes of predictor variables (Farrington, 1997; Hawkins et al., 1998; Lipsey & Derzon, 1998; Loeber & Dishion, 1983).

Criminogenic need factors are risk factors that are likely to change and can even reduce the probability of future conduct disorders. Another term for these factors is treatment needs since they highlight different targets of intervention (Hoge, 2002). While criminogenic needs may have little to do with the juvenile justice system where decisions are based specifically on the nature of the crimes, they are relevant in any system that has a rehabilitation focus (Hoge, 2002).

Responsivity factors are the characteristics of the youth that are not directly associated with the antisocial behavior but are pertinent to the youth's response to treatment or interventions. Some examples of responsivity factors are cognitive style, anxiety level, and motivation for treatment. Decisions regarding interventions and the individual's response should use responsivity factors in part as consideration. A special subset of responsivity factors are

protective factors which counter the effects of risk and are closely related to the idea of resilience (Hoge, 2002).

When looking at the assessment of youth, there is a lack of structure in the procedures which undoubtedly contributes to an increased level of inconsistencies and biases in the decisions made in the juvenile justice system. Standardization of assessments may lead to more consistent and valid judgments than clinical assessments. While some standardized assessments have been developed, they are informal and have been used mostly in localized jurisdictions (Hoge, 2002). An advantage of using standardized assessments with youth is that it ensures consistency in information processes and decision making across the system. Also, reliability and validity would be available and the quality of judgments could be examined. Lastly, standardized measures would allow for operational definitions of the judgments/inferences (Hoge, 1999a, 1999b, 2001; Hoge & Andrews, 1996a; LeBlanc, 1998; Wiebush et al., 1995). There have been advances and developments made in regards to adult standardized assessments but fewer efforts have been made with the youth population (Andrews & Bonta, 1998; Quinsey, Harris, Rice, & Cormier, 1998).

Three different youth standardized assessments will be discussed but it should be emphasized that since evaluations of the tools are continuing and actuarial data is not yet available, they are instruments currently in the development stages. These standardized assessments represent useful alternatives to the informal and unstructured procedures currently observed in the juvenile justice system. While these instruments all produce information about risk and need factors, they do vary in the factors covered, demands made on the conducting professional, and whether they are a screening tool or aid in developing recommendations (Hoge, 2002).

The Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS) was not created for use in the juvenile justice system but provides information about risk and needs factors that are pertinent to the justice system. This structured tool measures impairment in behavioral and emotional functioning by providing a global index of functioning and scores for five areas of functioning. These five areas are role performance, cognition, behavior towards others and self, moods/emotion, and substance abuse. There are the additional areas of if the youth's needs are being met, the quality of parenting provided, and strengths. The raters assesses the severity of impairment in the specific areas by using concrete behavioral markers that define a 4-point scale: severe impairment, moderate impairment, mild impairment, and minimal/no impairment. This tool is relatively simple to administer and does not need an advanced degree in psychological assessment (Hodges, 1994, 1999). Psychometric support has been found for this measure and show adequate levels of test-retest and internal reliability in addition to construct validity and predictive validity (Hodges, 1994, 1999; Hodges & Gust, 1995; Hodges & Wong, 1996; Hodges, Wong, & Latessa, 1998). Although there is previous psychometric support, continuing assessment of construct and predictive validity are needed (Hoge, 2002).

The Psychopathy Checklist: Youth Version (PCL-YV) is an adaption from the adult version of the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised which is highly researched and validated. The PCL-YV is a 20 item checklist which includes an interview with the youth and a records review but seems to be most appropriate in adolescents 15 years or older. When scoring the instrument, professional judgment should be administered by individuals with a background in psychological assessment. The PCL-YV aims to assess the extent to which a youth exhibits psychopathic characteristics. The score reflects the overall level of psychopathy but also has two subscores which indicate psychopathic personality characteristics and the psychopathic lifestyle. There

have been adequate levels of interrater agreement and internal consistency found. Also, concurrent and construct validity has been confirmed. Only a limited amount of information has been found on predictive validity of the tool. Lastly, the construct of psychopathy is not well defined and labeling youth as “psychopaths” should be cautioned (Hoge, 2002).

Lastly, the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI) is an instrument that is widely used in the criminal justice or correctional systems for assessing adult offenders (Andrews & Bonta, 1995). This tool is used to provide a detailed and comprehensive survey of the risks, needs, protective, and responsivity factors of the client. It encourages linking these together with decisions and types of services for the best outcome. The YLS/CMI is a checklist to be completed by a mental health professional or a professional in childcare, which can include probation officers. The checklist is completed through an interview, collateral informants, records review, and formal assessment where available. The first section of the instrument involves 42 items that assess risks and needs. These items are divided into eight subscales: offense history, family circumstances/parenting, education, peer relations, substance abuse, leisure/recreation, personality/behavior, and attitudes. There are additional areas where items of level of service, goals of intervention, and means for achieving these goals can be recorded (Hoge, 2002). Some strengths of this assessment measure are that it is based on the latest theory and research regarding correlates of criminal activity in youth, it is designed to provide a direct link between assessment of risks/needs and case planning, it is specifically designed for use by personnel who interact with these youth, and it derived from the LSI-R which has been proven to have strong psychometric properties among adults (Andrews & Bonta, 1995). Although there is strong evidence for the LSI-R in terms of psychometric properties, the normative and psychometric data for the YLS/CMI are preliminary at the moment (Hage, 2002).

