

NEARI NEWS:

TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

An Essential Tool for Professionals Working with those who Sexually Abuse or... A Great New Way to Stay Current with Cutting Edge Sexual Abuse Research.



Volume 4, Issue 4

April 2011

Dear Colleague,
This month's research paper looks at whether we accurately assess risk in adolescents if we do not distinguish between various adolescent age groups.

The researchers examined all forms of delinquency, including sexual abuse, and found significant differences between young adolescents (12-13) and older adolescents (15-17). In the younger group, dynamic risk factors were more important and seemed to support the imperative of early intervention whenever possible.

They also found that dynamic risk factors do not play an important role in determining the risk to abuse again in older adolescents and that more research may be needed to assess the importance of individual risk factors in developing effective interventions. As people explore various risk assessment instruments for their work, this paper demonstrates the need to have a tool that does assess clients differently depending upon their age.

Risk Factors for Adolescents Do Change with Age

by Steven Bengis, David S. Prescott, and Joan Tabachnick

Question

Are we accurately assessing risk in adolescents if we do not distinguish among various adolescent age groups and the various developmental differences?

The Research

In 2011, Van der Put, Dekovic, Stams, Van der Laan, Hoeve, and Van Amelsfort conducted a study on 1,396 youth with previous involvement with the criminal justice system and a range of offenses including but not limited to sexual abuse. They explored the prevalence and impact of both static and dynamic risk factors in different adolescent age groups with the goal of determining the differences between the most important predictors of recidivism in different adolescent age groups. While acknowledging some methodological challenges (e.g., using official reports of additional criminal acts that may understate re-offenses), their outcome data revealed statistically significant differences in the following three age groupings: 12-13, 14-15, 16-17 years.

The researchers found that the impact of dynamic risk factors is highest in younger adolescents and decline as adolescents get older. For example, detention as opposed to other preventive/treatment interventions in early adolescence (12-13) actually increases the chances of recidivism in that age group. They also found that some static risk factors become more important while other static risk factors become less important as the adolescent grows older (e.g., the type of offense is more predictive in older than in younger adolescents).

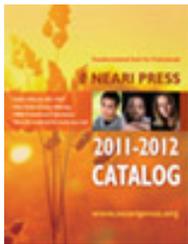
We hope you enjoy the article and we hope you also grapple with these important issues.

As always, we welcome your feedback. And if you want us to examine a particular issue, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis

www.nearipress.org



FEATURED NEARI RESOURCE

[An Introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorders, Sexual Behaviors, & Therapeutic Intervention](#)

by Gerry D. Blasingame

Therapists trained to work with clients who have sexual behavior problems are more and more frequently called upon to work with youth diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. But the literature has shown that the assumptions and methods that work so well with other clients often fail with this population. This timely book provides essential information about the Autism Spectrum Disorders, how to adjust the assessment process to accommodate this disorder, and practical approaches to understanding

Implications for Professionals

It is now considered both best and ethically necessary practice to use assessment tools with appropriate psychometric properties to assess risk of reoffense. Few, if any of these tools provides guidance on balancing static and dynamic variables based on age. Professionals in our field have tended to view "adolescence" as a monolithic category from 12-17, yet this research challenges us to recognize that young people change. The implications include:

- Risk needs to be re-evaluated frequently within each of these age groups;
- Identifying appropriate resources and linking these and other protective factors to a case management tool is critical;
- Because younger adolescents are more dependent on their environments, holistic interventions with schools and families and friends are more critical in this age group and more effective than detention;
- Environments become somewhat less important as youth age and, therefore, interventions with older adolescents should help foster independence and focus on individual risk factors rather than long-term external control (in other than extremely rare cases);
- Some degree of "anti-social" behavior is normative in adolescents. We need to differentiate between those adolescents who are pushing the envelope through time-limited adolescent anti-social behaviors and those who need our full involvement and may be exhibiting life-course persistent anti-social behaviors.

Implications for the Field

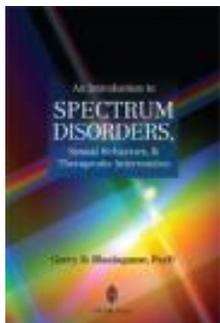
This research challenges us to expand our thinking about adolescence (which has long been defined as a time of intense change) and engage in more age-differentiated research about the impact of static, dynamic and preventive factors on sex re-offense risk at various ages. This particular research indicates the decreasing impact of presently agreed upon dynamic factors on general criminal behavior as youth enter late adolescence. The study emphasizes the need both to:

- Expand our knowledge about dynamic factors influencing outcomes in older adolescents through more research and
- Develop more resources to create effective treatment interventions in this age group.

Compounding the need for more research is the complexity of diagnostic differences among adolescents who abuse sexually. This includes what static, dynamic, and protective factors relate to risk differently in youth with severe trauma histories, significant mental health or neurologically based disorders. Further, professionals should ask what interventions would be most effective with these vastly different youth at various ages.

unique family dynamics, and healthy and problematic sexual behaviors.

To order the book, click the title above or the image of the book cover below:



ISBN: 978-1-929657-50-6
Catalog Number: 9882
Cost: \$27.00 + S&H

Also, feel free to visit NEARI Press publications and check out any of our practical brochures, workbooks, and textbooks:

<http://bookstore.nearipress.org/>.

Questions/Feedback

Please email us at info@nearipress.org or call us at 413.540.0712, x14 to let us know if you have a question or a topic you would like us to cover.

If at any time you no longer want the e-newsletter, just let us know and we will remove your name from our list.

We value your trust. We will not sell or give your contact information to any other organization.

As we continue to ask the right questions, it becomes ever more imperative to challenge both the use of adult research with youth and our own misconceptions about the monolithic "age of adolescence"; the appropriate role of risk assessments, prevention planning, containment; and the type of treatment that will lead to healthier abuse-free lives for all adolescents.

Abstract

This study examined to what extent the significance of both static and dynamic risk factors for recidivism changes in the course of adolescence. For this purpose, file and interview data of 1,396 juveniles charged with a criminal offense were analyzed. This study showed that the impact of almost all dynamic risk factors decreased as juveniles grew older. As a result, the predictive power of risk assessment models also decreased. From age 14, dynamic risk factors did not contribute significantly to the prediction of recidivism over static risk factors. Another consequence of the declining importance of dynamic risk factors is that the potential effect of an intervention aimed at these factors will also decrease as adolescents grow older, which indicates the importance of early intervention.

Citation

Van der Put, C.E., Dekovic, M., Stams, G.J.J.M., Van der Laan, P. H., Hoeve, M. and Van Amelsfort, L. (2011). Changes in Risk Factors during Adolescence: Implications for Risk Assessment. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 38, 248-262.

To print a pdf of this article, click [NEARI NEWS](#).

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

About the Editor:
David S. Prescott, LICSW

[David Prescott website](#)

An internationally recognized expert in the field of sexual abuse assessment, treatment, management, and prevention, Mr. Prescott has published numerous articles and authored, edited, and co-edited books on risk assessment, interviewing, and providing residential treatment to youth. He is a Past President of ATSA and is currently Clinical Director for the Becket Programs of Maine, overseeing inpatient and outpatient services for juveniles.