Development and Validation of a Juvenile Sexual Predation Risk Assessment Instrument

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Literature Review

Introduction

The accurate assessment of sexual violence risk among adolescents remains a critical yet underdeveloped area in forensic psychology. While adult psychopathy and sexual recidivism risk are well established through instruments such as the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R), there is no widely accepted, developmentally appropriate equivalent for adolescents that integrates personality traits, sexual deviance, and environmental risk factors (Hare, 2003). Juvenile sexual offenders (JSOs) represent a heterogeneous population, and most do not persist into adulthood as sexual offenders (Caldwell, 2016). This underscores the need for tools capable of distinguishing transient adolescent behavior from emerging predatory patterns.

Juvenile Sexual Offending: Typologies and Risk Factors

Juvenile sexual offending has been conceptualized through typological frameworks differentiating:

- Child-focused offenders
- Peer/adult offenders
- Opportunistic offenders

(Hunter et al., 2006)

Risk factors consistently identified include early trauma exposure, conduct disorder, family dysfunction, and deviant sexual interests (Seto & Lalumière, 2010). However, adolescent offending is often situational and influenced by developmental and environmental variables, making static models insufficient.

Callous-Unemotional Traits and Psychopathy in Youth

Callous-unemotional (CU) traits have emerged as a developmentally appropriate proxy for psychopathy in youth (Frick & White, 2008). These traits—characterized by lack of empathy, shallow affect, and absence of guilt—are strongly associated with persistent antisocial and aggressive behavior.

Importantly, CU traits combined with impulsivity and trauma exposure may represent a **high-risk cluster for predatory sexual behavior** (Frick et al., 2014). However, applying adult psychopathy constructs directly to adolescents raises concerns regarding developmental instability and ethical labeling.

Existing Risk Assessment Instruments

J-SOAP-II

The J-SOAP-II evaluates sexual drive, impulsivity, and treatment response (Prentky & Righthand, 2003). While widely used, it demonstrates mixed predictive validity.

ERASOR

The ERASOR uses structured clinical judgment to assess sexual recidivism risk (Worling & Curwen, 2001). Its flexibility is offset by reduced standardization.

SAVRY

The SAVRY assesses general violence risk but lacks specificity for sexual offending (Borum et al., 2006).

Limitations of Existing Models

Key limitations across tools include:

- Insufficient integration of personality traits
- Overreliance on static historical factors
- Limited developmental sensitivity
- Weak predictive validity across populations

Adult-derived tools such as the PCL-R are inappropriate for adolescents due to construct validity concerns and ethical risks (Hare, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates:

- **Developmental Psychopathology** (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002)
- **Social Learning Theory** (Bandura, 1977)
- **Neurodevelopmental Models** (Steinberg, 2009)

These frameworks support a multidimensional approach incorporating affective, behavioral, sexual, and environmental domains.

Conclusion

There is a clear gap in the literature for a structured, empirically validated instrument assessing **juvenile sexual predation risk**. The proposed Juvenile Sexual Predation Checklist (JSPC) seeks to address this gap.

Problem Statement (Walden Format)

Despite advances in forensic risk assessment, there is currently no empirically validated instrument that integrates callous-unemotional traits, sexual deviance indicators, and developmental context to assess sexual predation risk among adolescents. Existing tools either lack specificity for sexual offending or fail to incorporate personality-based risk factors, limiting their predictive validity and utility in forensic and clinical decision-making.

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Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative instrument development and validation study is to develop and evaluate the psychometric properties of the Juvenile Sexual Predation Checklist (JSPC), a structured professional judgment tool designed to assess sexual predation risk among adolescents aged 12–17.

Research Questions & Hypotheses

RQ1

What is the factor structure of the JSPC?

- **H1:** The JSPC will demonstrate a four-factor structure:
  - Affective/Interpersonal
  - Behavioral Dysregulation
  - Sexual Deviance
  - Environmental Context

RQ2

What is the reliability of the JSPC?

- **H2a:** Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) ≥ .80
- **H2b:** Inter-rater reliability (ICC) ≥ .75

RQ3

What is the predictive validity of the JSPC?

- **H3:** JSPC scores will significantly predict sexual recidivism within 24 months ($p < .05$)

RQ4

How does the JSPC compare to existing tools?

- **H4:** JSPC will demonstrate stronger predictive validity than J-SOAP-II and ERASOR

Proposed Instrument: JSPC

Structure

- 20 items total
- 4 domains (5 items each)
- 3-point scoring (0 = absent, 1 = partial, 2 = present)

Sample Items

Affective/Interpersonal

1. Lack of remorse for sexual harm
2. Callous disregard for victim impact
3. Manipulative interpersonal style
4. Shallow emotional expression
5. Lack of empathy

Behavioral Dysregulation

6. Impulsivity
7. History of aggression
8. Rule violations
9. Poor behavioral controls
10. Escalation of antisocial behavior

Sexual Deviance

11. Persistent deviant sexual fantasies
12. Use of coercion/manipulation
13. Victim targeting patterns
14. Sexual preoccupation

15. Boundary violations

Environmental Context

16. History of abuse/trauma
17. Family dysfunction
18. Peer deviance
19. Exposure to sexual content
20. Lack of supervision

Scoring Rubric

- **0–13:** Low risk
- **14–26:** Moderate risk
- **27–40:** High risk

Additional Features:

- Structured clinical judgment override
- Dynamic vs. static factor weighting

Validation Study Design

Methodology

- Quantitative, cross-sectional + longitudinal follow-up
- Instrument development + validation design

Sample

- N = 200–300 adolescents (ages 12–17)
- न्याय-involved youth (probation, residential treatment)

Measures

- JSPC (new tool)
- J-SOAP-II
- ERASOR
- Official recidivism records

Statistical Analyses

- Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)
- Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)
- Cronbach's alpha
- Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC)
- ROC curve analysis (AUC)
- Logistic regression

IRB Considerations (Critical for Walden)

- Protection of minors (assent + parental consent)
- Confidentiality of sensitive data
- Mandatory reporting compliance
- Minimization of psychological harm
- Secure data storage

Publication & Grant Alignment

Target Journals

- *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*
- *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*
- *Criminal Justice and Behavior*

Grant Opportunities

- National Institute of Justice (NIJ)
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)

Impact Potential

This research has strong potential to:

- Influence juvenile justice policy
- Improve risk assessment accuracy
- Reduce false positives/negatives
- Enhance rehabilitation targeting

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