

Assessment of Sexual Offender Risk and Evaluation of Change using the VRS-SO

Symposium Chair: Mark E. Olver, Ph.D.

The Violence Risk Scale-Sexual Offender version (VRS-SO; Wong, Olver, Nicholaichuk, & Gordon, 2003) is a sex offender risk assessment and treatment planning tool comprised of static and dynamic factors. The instrument is developed to appraise risk, identify targets for sex offender intervention, and to evaluate treatment readiness and change, corresponding to risk reduction, from treatment or other change agents. The present symposium is a collection of three talks featuring research on issues in the assessment and management of sex offender risk incorporating new findings on the VRS-SO. The first presentation is a synthesis and application of research findings of dynamic sexual violence risk featuring VRS-SO normative data from three samples (N = 945) of treated sexual offenders from Canada and New Zealand. The second symposium features a cross validation of the VRS-SO on a sample of 180 treated adult male sex offenders, with data presented on the predictive accuracy of VRS-SO scores and change ratings for sexual and violent recidivism, as well as its convergent validity with other measures of sex offender risk and treatment readiness and change. The third and final presentation features a comprehensive psychometric examination of a youth adaptation of the VRS-SO (VRS-Youth Sexual Offender version; VRS-YSO) on a sample of 99 Canadian court adjudicated male adolescent sexual offenders. These three studies provide important evidence for the dynamism of sexual violence risk and practical applications of change data from a clinical risk assessment tool to inform sexual violence risk assessments.

Assessment of Dynamic Sexual Violence Risk and Change among Treated Sexual Offenders using the VRS-SO: Normative Data from Three Samples

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As a dynamic risk assessment and treatment planning tool, the Violence Risk Scale-Sexual Offender version (VRS-SO; Wong, Olver, Nicholaichuk, & Gordon, 2003) is designed to inform treatment readiness and evaluate risk change among sexual offenders. This presentation is a synthesis and application of research findings of dynamic sexual violence risk featuring VRS-SO data from three samples (N = 945) of treated sex offenders from Canada and New Zealand. Normative data are presented examining the magnitude of treatment related change and the relationship of changes in

risk to sexual and violent recidivism over a fixed 5-year follow-up. Supporting data are presented for systematically incorporating VRS-SO change information via logistic regression modelling into actuarially-based estimates of sexual and violent recidivism to quantify risk reductions. Implications for the assessment of dynamic risk in sexual offenders and practical applications of risk-change information are discussed.

Examining the Interrelationships of Sexual Offender Risk, Treatment Readiness, Therapeutic Change, and Recidivism among Sex Offenders

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The present study examined the interrelationship of risk for reoffending, treatment readiness, treatment attrition, change subsequent to programming, and recidivism among sexual offenders. It is primarily a cross validation of selected risk assessment measures (Static-99R, STABLE 2007, and VRS-SO) and a clinical rating scale (Treatment Readiness, Responsivity, and Gain Scale: Short Version; TRRG:SV). A primary focus of the study was on evaluating the relationship between program-related change and recidivism. The study is archival and participants included approximately 180 federally incarcerated adult male sex offenders who participated in the Clearwater Sex Offender Program at the Regional Psychiatric Centre (Saskatoon, SK) from 1997-2001 and followed up a mean of 9.3 years (SD = 3.0) post-release. Twenty percent of the sample was convicted for a new sexual offense, 45% had any new violent conviction, and 61% were convicted for any new offense. VRS-SO pre- and posttreatment dynamic and total scores significantly predicted sexual, violent, and general recidivism (AUC = .61 to .68). Moreover, the VRS-SO dynamic factors (posttreatment) demonstrated incremental validity, controlling for the Static-99R in the prediction of sexual and violent recidivism. These treated men also made significant pre-post changes on the VRS-SO, STABLE 2007, and TRRG:SV. Risk-changes on the VRS-SO dynamic factors were significantly associated with reductions in violent recidivism, with and without controlling for pretreatment risk, while positive treatment changes on the TRRG:SV Responsivity and Readiness scales predicted reductions in sexual and violent recidivism outcomes. Implications for offender management, treatment planning, and release decision-making are discussed.

A Psychometric Examination of the Violence Risk Scale: Youth Sexual Offender Version (VRS:YSO)

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The present research involved a comprehensive psychometric examination of a developmentally appropriate risk assessment measure designed to assess risk for sexual violence, guide treatment planning, assess readiness to change, and evaluate whether positive changes in risk are linked to reductions in risk for sexual violence among sexually offending youth—the Violence Risk Scale: Youth Sexual Offender version (VRS:YSO). The first part of this investigation focused on an examination of the basic psychometric properties of a young offender version of the Violence Risk Scale—Sexual Offender Version (VRS—SO; Wong et al., 2003), subsequently referred to as the VRS:YSO. The tool revision was based on a thorough review of the literature on youth and adults who have sexually offended, a review of a measure designed to assess risk for violence among violent youth (i.e., the VRS:YV), and structural revisions to the tool completed by the developers of the VRS:SO. The resulting risk assessment measure included six *static* and 17 *dynamic risk variables* that are empirically and/or theoretically associated with an increased risk for sexual violence among youth. The VRS:YSO was rated on 99 male sexually offending youths who had received outpatient sex offender services from the Saskatoon Health Region, Child and Youth Services (CYS)—Young Offender Program (YOP) as part of its initial psychometric examination. Overall, the VRS:YSO showed good-to-excellent interrater reliability, sound item properties (internal consistency and item-total correlations), and a factor structure that is consistent with research on sexually offending youth and other measures of risk for sexual violence.

The second part this investigation focused on the validation of the VRS:YSO through examining the concurrent (comparisons with existing risk assessment measures such as the J-SOAP-II, ERASOR, and J-SORRAT-II), postdictive, predictive, and incremental validity of the measure. All measures were rated from 100 youth files (same sample as above). Youth were followed-up for an average of 11.83 years ($SD = 3.42$, range = 3.89-17.41) starting from their first contact with the community post-adjudication (i.e., release from custody or commencement of a community sentence). Overall reconvictions rates were 8% for sexual, 24% for any violent (sexual and nonsexual), and 37% for general (any) offending. In sum, there was solid evidence for the concurrent validity of the VRS:YSO, as well as for its postdictive and predictive validity to some extent, particularly with respect to any violence and general recidivism. There was also encouraging evidence, albeit offset seemingly by a small post-treatment N and thus restricted power, on the potential value of the therapeutic change score in the prediction of recidivism risk. These findings supported the value of the VRS:YSO as a new specialized risk assessment measure for sexually offending youth, particularly as it uniquely includes a mechanism for assessing change. Clinical implications of research findings, along with limitations and future directions for research will be addressed.