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# The problem of risk assessment of children: can better prognosis reduce recidivism?

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# Introduction

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- Every society has to face the situation that there is a very small group of children and youth who do not respect elementary societal rules and who offend repeatedly, more often and more seriously
- **But how do we know who belongs to this group and who does not?**
  - Predicting probability of children/youth re-offending is one of the most challenging tasks for experts and has become an important part of criminal policy

# Recidivism in children and youth

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**NO DATA FROM CROATIA, but studies for UK, Germany, USA, Australia, New Zealand show...**

- Between 38% and 68% of youth reoffenders vs. between 30% and 40% of adult reoffenders
- The reoffending rate for **young adults has followed a general downward trend over the last ten years**, whereas the **reoffending rates for children and young people had been generally increasing** → destructive cycle of crime that some young people fall into and struggle to get out of
- Complicated and chaotic lives
  - Many have experienced trauma, such as abuse or bereavement (avg. 62%), grown up in care (avg. 45%), been excluded from school (avg. 62%), experienced drug or alcohol related dependencies and have mental health problems or personality disorders (avg. 30%; 18% have a history of self-harm; on avg. 11% are registered with Disability Services, and on avg. 24% have 'issues concerning their intellectual functioning')
  - On avg. 40% of young people in youth justice centres have a parent or a sibling with a history of imprisonment

# Recidivism in children and youth

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**NO DATA FROM CROATIA, but studies for UK, Germany, USA, Australia, New Zealand show...**

- Young people are increasingly isolated from family → some young offenders end up in custody a long way from home
- Lack of adequate support
  - Justice centres are under strain → staff shortages and burnout, damaged infrastructure, and the high needs of the young people → lack of good relationships
  - Youths do not get enough professional support, and they don't know what their future holds
    - Unsettled, anxious, bored or angry
  - Support isn't consistent between youth and adult systems → young people fall unsupported through the system's cracks

# Risk prediction/prognosis in adults

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- A wide variety of prognostic instruments for adults → human behavior can be predicted objectively and precisely
  - e.g., Psychopathy Checklist (Hare 1991 ), PCL-SV (screening/short version) and PCL-R (revised), Level of Service Inventory—Revised (LSI-R, Andrews & Bonta 1995 ), the Historical Clinical Risk (HCR-20, Douglas et al. 2013) etc.

- **Risk prediction/prognosis**

## Anglo-American countries

- crime forecast is based primarily on these kinds of actuarial assessment instruments

## European countries

- helpful, but not sufficient enough for crime prognosis (Dahle, 2006)
- behavioral instruments should complement a series of other carefully and clinically informed appraisals and should not be used as a substitute for them when making an assessment about a prisoner



# Risk prediction/prognosis in adults

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- **PROBLEMS**

- Few items related to demographic characteristics, criminal history and personality variables related to high probability of severe recidivism  **not sufficient to predict individual' s behavior**
  - a high score on a scale does not necessarily indicate a high risk, because there may be a lot of protective variables in the surroundings of the individual (e.g., good relationships, satisfying conditions of living) to keep them from committing crimes again
- Strong emphasis on historical events



# Risk prediction/prognosis in adults

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- **PROBLEMS**

- Although courts tend to be satisfied with statements as to the degree of dangerousness shown by a test-score, as a high score at first sight is rather convincing, **the actual predictive validity is very limited**
- Instruments neglect individual developments and changes ➔ **WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS?**



# Example

# s in adults

- F  
H

Data regarding level of education, psychiatric diagnosis, criminal history, hospitalization/imprisonment periods, risk assessment scores, and IQ scores were gathered by accessing both CPS files and psychiatric hospital records. Diagnoses were based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder-IV text revision (DSM-IV-TR; American Psychiatric Association, 2000)

: Screening version (PCL-R/PCL:SV;

antisocial) scores  
m after 2 years  
and interpersonal  
ism (e.g., Jeandarme et

deficits) did not predict (v  
al., 2017)?!

Lack



Luens, Skeem, & Douglas, 2006, cf. Gendreau et al., 2002).

+ Range of unethical and antisocial behaviors

# Example: Psychopathy features in adolescents

- **Psychopathy Checklist: Youth Version (Hare, 2003)**

**SHORT (14.5 month) follow-up!!!**

- **Corrado et al. (2004):** Both a two-factor and three-factor model of the PCL:YV significantly predicted general and violent behavior, with the two-factor model ranging from 68 to 63%. However, these associations were explained primarily by callous-unemotional traits rather than interpersonal or affective traits.

If the aging process alone ameliorates psychopathic symptoms for a significant proportion of youth (Edens et al., 2001; Seagrave & Grisso, 2002), psychopathy assessments would lack sensitivity for longer-term predictions!

# Example: Psychopathy features in adolescents

- **Psychopathy Checklist: Youth Version (PCL-YV; Forth, Kosson, & Hare, 2003)**
- **Schmidt et al. (2006):** With a mean follow-up period of 2 years, the PCL-YV was found to predict general recidivism for boys and girls. However, it was not a significant predictor for girls and failed to predict violent recidivism for both sexes.
  - These studies do not lend support for the use of the PCL:YV as a risk factor for girl offenders!**
  - Interpersonal and affective features of psychopathy not stable across adolescence?**
- **Vincent et al. (2013):** In a 3-year study, both the PCL-YV and the PCL:SV were significant predictors for boys; however, contrary to findings from studies using shorter follow-up periods, the predictive power was due primarily to the behavioral features of psychopathy. The PCL:YV was not a significant predictor of non-violent or violent recidivism for girls.

# Example: Psychopathy features in adolescents

- Psychopathy Checklist: Youth Version (PCL-YV; Forth, Kosson, & Hare, 2003)

- Edens  
data for  
been  
when  
scores

**These modest effects underscore recent concerns raised about the utility of psychopathy as a risk factor for future criminality, particularly among multiethnic offender samples!**

**Developmental variations in the manifestation of psychopathy during adolescence?**

recidivism  
who had  
in 1996  
or factor  
years

# Example: Psychopathy features in adolescents

- **Predictive and incremental validity of the PCL:YV over and above other risk measures?**

- For example:

- Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY; Borum et al., 2002)
- Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI; Hoge & Andrews, 2002)



- **Very few studies examining predictive and incremental validity of different risk assessment tools!!!**

# Example: Psychopathy features in adolescents

## Predictive and incremental validity of the PCL:YV over and above other risk measures?

- **Catchpole and Gretton (2003)**: identical predictive accuracy between the SAVRY, YLS/CMI and the PCL:YV (follow-up period of 1 year)
- **Welsh and colleagues (2008)**: the SAVRY showed incremental validity over the YLS/CMI and the PCL:YV in the prediction of violent and general recidivism (a mean follow-up period of 35.8 months; range from 7 to 61 months)

# Example: Psychopathy features in adolescents

## Predictive and incremental validity of the PCL:YV over and above other risk measures?

- **Schmidt and colleagues (2011):** the SAVRY and the PCL:YV had incremental validity over the YLS/CMI assessments in the prediction of violent recidivism, but did not evidence significant incremental predictive accuracy (a mean follow-up period of 10.4 years)
- **Hilterman and colleagues (2014):** the SAVRY and the PCL:YV did not have incremental validity over the YLS/CMI assessments in the prediction of either violent or general reoffending. Similarly, the YLS/CMI and the PCL:YV did not have incremental validity over the SAVRY when predicting either violent or general reoffending (follow-up period of 1 year)

# Example: Psychopathy features in children

**Colins (2016):** incorporating the Limited Prosocial Emotions specifier (i.e., CU traits) into a diagnosis of conduct problems as recommended by the DSM–5 may have restricted clinical usefulness in differentiating subgroups of youth after controlling for other risk factors, including varying levels of psychiatric problems and antisocial behavior.

(CU traits) add to the **over and above** other known **problems** (e.g., Pardini, Obradovic, Loeber, 2004; Wasserman et al., 2004). **Like hyperactivity** (e.g., Borke, Loeber, & Van Kammen, 1990;

- DSM-5
- ad
- dis

Satterfield & Sprafkin (1999; Jolliffe & Frick, 2000) **inadequate parenting**

- oversampled high-risk youth (Pardini & Fite, 2010) behavior/attention

**Ručević & Andershed (2021):** after controlling for individual (i.e., hyperactivity and previous conduct problems) and parenting risk factors at age 5, only impulsivity-need for stimulation (behavioral deficits) was an independent, albeit weak, predictor of conduct problems at age 10, but not aggression.

# Risk prediction/prognosis in children and adolescents

- **PROBLEMS**

- Short follow-up periods
- Some risk measures are downward extension of adult measures
- No information on incremental validity of different risk assessment measures



IA CHILD

The project is funded by the Justice Programme of the European Union (2014-2020)

# Can better prognosis reduce recidivism?

**No, but yes....**



# Can better prognosis reduce recidivism?

- **HOLISTIC APPROACH!!!!**

- balanced evaluation of strengths and weaknesses → most accurate assessment of (violence) risk → individualized guidelines for a strength-based case management → effective mitigation of recidivism risk





# Can better prognosis reduce recidivism?

- Implementation of evidence-based practices and policies
- Use of valid and reliable instruments
- In addition to risk measures, based on longitudinal studies, assessment should include....
  - age when the first delinquent act was committed
  - problems at school or work
  - antisocial peers
  - poor use of leisure time
  - lack of parental supervision/harsh parenting
  - criminality in family members
  - +++ capabilities and strengths

**“tools with statistically significant accuracy maintain that accuracy regardless of the developmental period in which re-offending occurred” (Hoge et al., 2012, pp. 171-173)**





IA CHILD

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**ANY QUESTIONS? 😊**

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# IA CHILD



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HFC  
"Hope  
For  
Children"

# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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*Silvija Ručevič*



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