

Juvenile offender recidivism essay sample



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Juvenile violent offenders are among the most dangerous offenders in the criminal justice system, responsible and convicted for a variety of severe criminal offenses such as robbery, assault, rape, and homicide.

Thus, the assessment of juvenile offenders for risk of recidivism, treatment planning, and treatment effectiveness has invoked considerable research interest. Only recently has research into the development and validation of juvenile assessment instruments, implementation of different treatment approaches and intervention programs as well as studies of the effectiveness of treatment with juvenile offenders advanced considerably.

The risk-needs-responsivity (RNR) model is considered the most influential model for determining offender risk-assessment and treatment. Over the last few decades the model of effective correctional intervention has become the most commonly used paradigm of corrections and juvenile justice (Andrews, Bonta, & Wormith, 2011; Howell, Lipsey, & Wilson, 2014; McGrath & Thompson, 2012; Peterson-Badali, Skilling, & Haqanee, 2015; Vose, Lowenkamp, Smith, & Cullen, 2009).

As suggested by its name, the model proposes the following three principles at the essence of effective programming:

1) the risk principle addresses the question of who should be treated and states that the level of service provided to the offender should match the offender's risk to re-offend (high-risk offenders vs. low-risk offenders). Thus, high-risk offenders should receive intensive corrections, while interventions for the low-risk offenders should be minimized since interventions with low-risk offenders can induce paradoxical effects such as increment in recidivism

(Gendreau, Smith, & French, 2006; Ogloff & Davis, 2004, Andrews & Dowden, 2006);

2) the need principle addresses what should be treated and states that treatment should identify and target criminogenic needs (also called dynamic factors) – e. g., criminal thinking patterns

3) the responsivity principle addresses how should be treated and highlights the importance of applying correctional practices useful to change criminal behavior (e. g., cognitive-behavioral and social learning approaches).

Interventions should be highly individualized to match treatment to client characteristics. In particular, the procedure should be adapted to the offenders' strengths, abilities, motivation, personality, and bio-demographic characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, and age (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

The three principles of risk, need, and responsivity is the core, and together have come to be known as the RNR (risk-need-responsivity) model of offender rehabilitation.

According to the RNR model, offending is an outcome of a combination of the static and dynamic risk factor, both predictive of reoffending. While static, historical risk factors (such as age at first offense, prior criminal history) are features not amenable to deliberate intervention, dynamic risk factors (e. g., criminal attitudes such as thoughts, values, and beliefs supportive of criminal behavior) can change in both directions. For example, one can develop prosocial or criminal attitudes.

The following dynamic factors have been identified as significant to reducing offending: substance use, antisocial cognition, antisocial associates, family and marital relations, employment, and leisure and recreational activities (Andrews & Bonta, 2006).

Given that dynamic risk factors are considered responsible for increased risk, they have also been called criminogenic needs. Although static risk factors do predict long-term recidivism (e. g., Harris & Rice, 2003), the assessment of change in offender risk level, however, requires the consideration of dynamic (changeable) risk factors. Since they are sensitive to changes and responsive to interventions, focusing the treatment on criminogenic needs (active elements) is considered a fundamental component of the RNR model (Lowenkamp & Bechtel, 2007; Simourd, 2004).

Evidence shows that recidivism can be reduced up to 10% when criminogenic risk factors are addressed in a community setting (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Lipsey, 1995; Lösel, 1995). Moreover, intervention programs addressing dynamic factors and explicitly adopting the risk, needs, and responsivity principles, show a possible reduction in recidivism up to 50% (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990).

In a meta-analysis, including 400 treatment studies of juvenile delinquents and yielding 443 effect size estimates, Lipsey (1989) evidenced that treatment, on average, had a 10% reduction on recidivism. After controlling for methodological (e. g., sample size, attrition) and treatment variables (e. g., duration, evaluator involvement), reduction in recurrence increased by

30%. Since Lipsey's (1989) meta-analysis, the overall effectiveness of offender treatment was confirmed by 40 more meta-analyses.

The RNR model appears to generalize across a variety of settings, criminal behavior, and offender subtypes. Adherence to the RNR principles is associated with reduced re-offending in both community and custodial settings. Meta-analytic studies have found the laws to apply to youth (Andrews, Zinger, et al., 1990; Dowden & Andrews, 1999a), women offenders (Dowden & Andrews, 1999b), and minorities (Andrews & Bonta, 2006; Andrews, Dowden, & Rettinger, 2001).

Adherence to the principles in treatment programs also appear relevant to violent offending (Dowden & Andrews, 2000), prison misconducts (French & Gendreau, 2006), gangs (Di Placido, Simon, Witte, Gu, & Wong, 2006), and even sexual offending (Hanson, Bourgon, Helmus, & Hodgson, 2009).

HAB as a criminogenic need/dynamic factor: definition, relation to aggressive behavior and assessment approaches

The phenomenon of juvenile delinquency and violent behavior highlights the need for exploring the components of juvenile violation on a behavioral and cognitive level.

Committing a passionate crime addresses not only the potential for aggressive behavior but equally importantly personal attitudes and values supporting aggression and crime such as high tolerance for deviance, rejection of the validity of the law, interpretation of a wide range of stimuli as hostile, resentment and defiance, etc. Discovering the factors associated

with the manifestation and maintenance of aggressive behavior is an essential step in understanding youth crime.

Therefore, one of the well-recognized changing factors/criminogenic needs that reinforce participation in the criminal activity is the subdomain of antisocial attitudes or antisocial cognitions (Walters, 1990). Antisocial thought patterns, such as justification, rationalization, entitlement, and hostility have shown to be associated with a criminal history (Healy & O'Donnell, 2006; Palmer & Hollin, 2004).

Walters (1995, 2003) and Henning and Frueh (1996) offer that cognitive thinking errors reinforce criminal lifestyles through self-interest, minimization of prosocial activities, denial of responsibility for behavior, and pleasurable or deviant thoughts about criminal activity. The current study focuses on the assessment of one particular crucial component of the antisocial attitudes, namely the hostility-prone cognitions.

Hostility-prone cognitions are shown to be a prevalent symptom among young offenders. They represent the individual's tendency to over-attribute hostile intent to the behavior of others, even in situations where hostile attributions are unjustified, for example, when the actual intentions of others are benign or when the social situation is ambiguous (Dodge, 1980; Dodge & Frame, 1982).

Furthermore, hostility-prone attributions are shown to affect the encoding of social cues and, thus, to lead to impulsive or aggressive overreactions that are incongruent with the situation (Crick & Dodge, 1996; Dodge & Coie, 1987).

An extensive number of studies suggest that individuals with aggressive tendencies often feel provoked by ambiguous behavior and attribute a contrary, hostile intent to other people's actions, particularly in uncertain, unclear circumstances (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dodge & Frame, 1982; Dodge & Newman, 1981; Dodge, Price, Newman, & Bachorowski, 1990; Van Oostrum & Horvath, 1997; for overview and review, see Dodge, 2006; Orobio de Castro, Veerman, Koops, Bosch, & Monshouwer, 2002). This phenomenon is referred to as hostile cognitive/attribution bias (HAB). HAB relates mainly to the distorted perception of other's intentions in an interpersonal social context.

Hostility-prone attributions of intent and their relation to violent behavior, aggression and crime appear to generalize across a variety of settings and samples. Studies have found HAB to apply to children (e. g., Dodge & Coie, 1987), adults, as well as in forensic samples – both juvenile (Dodge et al., 1990; Slaby & Guerra, 1988) and adult offenders (Seager, 2005; Serin, 1991; Vitale, Newman, Serin, & Bolt, 2005).

HAB shows a close semantic relationship with paranoia and suspicion and shares notable similarities with paranoid patterns of thought. Some even claim that HAB is one of the different cognitive processes – along with an attention bias for threat and jumping-to-conclusions-bias – that are likely components of a paranoid thinking style in both normative and atypically developing individuals (Tone & Davis, 2012).

A few recent studies showed evidence that hostile intent attribution biases constitute a core element of paranoid thought, both in healthy samples

(Combs, Penn, Wichert, & Waldheter, 2007; Fornells-Ambrojo & Garety, 2009) and in adults with persecutory delusions (Combs et al., 2009).

Although paranoia primarily indicates a clinical psychopathological condition, the term now signifies a tendency toward excessive or irrational suspiciousness and distrustfulness of others. HAB, in particular, is defined to represent the non-pathological, normative aspects of the paranoid thinking style/interpersonal suspiciousness and, thus, is widely used in ordinary, nonclinical discourse.

There are different methods of assessing hostility-prone attributions. Standardized, clinic-based measures of hostility as a personality feature and irrational suspiciousness have been incorporated routinely into the diagnostic of HAB. Purportedly, they provide objective data less influenced by other factors (e. g., well-differentiated language skills needed in other measures such as semi-projective methods) that might otherwise bias participants' report.

On the other hand, they are profoundly affected by the self-perception of the participants and often contain socially desirable responses.

The most popular procedure for assessing HAB is the vignettes method proposed by Dodge (1980). Based on his idea of testing HAB using social scenarios, several different versions of this method have been developed for the experimental research.

The vignettes represent social situations, in which the subjects experience an adverse outcome (for instance, being excluded from a group game). Since

there is no additional information about the circumstances or intentions of others involved in the social interaction, the situation becomes highly ambiguous. The subjects are asked to decide whether the other person has acted on purpose or by accident and, thereby, to indirectly attribute a hostile or benign intent to the other individual's actions. The vignettes dominate the later studies and have already established themselves as a reliable instrument, which makes it possible to distinguish between aggressive and nonaggressive children (e. g., Dodge & Somberg, 1987).

In forensic samples, vignettes are the most commonly used instrument for assessing hostility-prone cognitions and are usually preferred to other experimental methods such as self-assessment instruments or a real-life social experiment.

However, in a realistic social context, the individuals are often confronted with numerous highly ambiguous factors when judging someone's behavior as hostile or benign. For humans, the endowment to observe and control the environment efficiently for signs of a threat to oneself is critical for their survival (Ledoux, 1996). In many clinical disorders, however, individuals respond inadequately to threat cues, developing a pattern of hypervigilance or attentional bias toward threat (Gotlib et al., 2004; Mogg & Bradley, 1998; Werthmann et al., 2011) that in turn may negatively bias interpretation of ambiguous cues (White, Suway, Pine, Bar-Haim, Fox, 2011).

Attention biases for threat have been repeatedly evidenced in the context of anxiety (for a review, see Bar-Haim, Lamy, Pergamin, Bakersman-Kranenburg, & van IJzendoorn, 2007). Some studies suggest further that

adults vulnerable to paranoid thought, both those with clinically significant persecutory delusions (e. g., Bentall & Kaney, 1989; Kinderman, 1994; Leafhead, Young, & Szulecka, 1996) and those who endorse normal-range paranoid ideation (e. g., Arguedas, Green, Langdon, & Coltheart, 2006), show a similar bias to over-attend to different types of threat cues, even in the absence of real danger.

Experimental research suggested that the impaired ability to decode critical social signals might be a probable reason for individuals to interpret another's behavior inaccurately and attribute hostile intent (Schöneberg & Jusyte, 2014).

Studies investigating the link between HAB and the processing of facial expression found that subjects with high scores in hostility perceived happy and neutral faces as less friendly (Knyazev, Bocharov, & Slobodskoj-Plusnin, 2009) and that a generalized attributional bias to infer malice from various classes of unambiguous social stimuli becomes more pronounced as aggressiveness increases (Nasby, Hayden, & De Paulo, 1980).

Schönenberg & Jusyte (2014) found that aggression is associated with a strong preference to interpret ambiguous stimuli containing proportions of an angry expression as hostile, while there was no evidence for a generally biased interpretation of distress cues under conditions of uncertainty.

References:

- Juvenile offender definition and meaning | Collins English Dictionary | <https://definitions.uslegal.com/j/juvenile-offender/>