

The Prediction of Risk to Recidivate Among a Juvenile Offending Population

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The results described below are part of a doctoral dissertation successfully defended from the Department of Criminology, Law and Society, University of Florida.

Purpose:

To validate the Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT) risk assessment
To explore gender differences in predicting recidivism risk

Hypotheses:

The following hypotheses were explored:

1. Overall risk to re-offend, as presented by the PACT, will significantly predict recidivism, with higher risk youth more likely to re-offend. (Supported).
2. Youth assessed as higher risk to re-offend will do so, regardless of whether the youth was assessed and placed on probation (remained in the community), or assessed prior to or during a residential placement and tracked post-release (Not supported).
3. The higher the criminal history score, as presented by the PACT, the more likely the youth will re-offend (Supported).
4. The higher the social history score, as presented by the PACT, the more likely the youth will re-offend (Supported).
5. Overall risk to re-offend, as presented by the PACT, will be a significant predictor of male recidivism and female recidivism (Supported).
6. Males will be more likely to re-offend than females, controlling for overall risk level (Supported).
7. Gender differences that may appear will be “washed out” to insignificance with the inclusion of proxy measures (such as school relationships and history of physical or sexual abuse) (Supported).
8. History of physical or sexual abuse will not be a stronger predictor of female re-offending than of male re-offending (Supported).
9. Overall risk to re-offend, as presented by the PACT, will be a significant predictor of white youth recidivism and “non-white” youth recidivism (Supported).
10. Overall risk to re-offend, as presented by the PACT, will be a significant predictor of recidivism where the subsequent offense is a violent offense (Supported).

Study Groups:

The study utilized three groups of youth:

1. Youth assessed who subsequently remain in the community and tracked 6 months and 12 months.

2. Youth assessed who subsequently enter residential commitment and tracked 6 months and 12 months.
3. Youth assessed while in residential commitment and tracked 6 months and 12 months post-release.

Group 1:

- ✚ 36,325 youth assessed who remain in the community and tracked 6 months
- ✚ 8,132 youth assessed who remain in the community and tracked 12 months
- ✚ Overall risk to re-offend, as assessed by the PACT, is a significant predictor of which youth will recidivate with higher risk youth more likely to re-offend. Male youth and “non-white” youth are also significantly more likely to re-offend.

*This analysis shows that the PACT works as intended for youth assessed who remain in the community. Low risk youth are less likely to re-offend than moderate risk, which are less likely than moderate-high risk youth, which are less likely than high risk youth.

Recidivism rates for youth tracked 12 months are:

- ✚ Low risk youth: 27.3%
- ✚ Moderate risk youth: 43.6%
- ✚ Moderate-high risk youth: 48.3%
- ✚ High-risk youth: 50.3%

Group 2:

- ✚ 2,850 youth assessed prior to residential commitment and tracked 6 months
- ✚ 984 youth assessed prior to residential commitment and tracked 12 months
- ✚ For youth tracked 12 months, the *lower* the risk as assessed by the PACT, the more likely the youth will recidivate.

*This analysis is in keeping with the Risk Principle illustrating the iatrogenic effects of providing intensive services to low risk youth. When low risk youth are provided intensive services for long periods of time (such as residential commitment), the services actually *increase* the likelihood of recidivism.

Group 3:

- ✚ 549 youth assessed while in residential commitment and tracked 6 months post-release
- ✚ 31 youth assessed while in residential commitment and tracked 12 months post-release
- ✚ For youth tracked 6 months, overall risk to re-offend, as presented by the PACT, was not a significant predictor of recidivism. Gender was a significant predictor with male youth more likely to recidivate.
- ✚ For youth tracked 12 months, overall risk to re-offend was not a significant predictor of recidivism.

*The inability of the PACT to significantly predict recidivism for youth assessed while in residential commitment helps illustrate the need for the creation of a Residential PACT

(R-PACT). The scoring of the PACT for youth currently in residential commitment is in essence artificial. Questions utilized in scoring related to current substance use, current school attendance, and current association with deviant peers contribute to the artificial nature of the scoring for residential youth (the youth, theoretically, can not use substances in residential placement, must attend school, and is forced to associate with all deviant peers, as they are in a residential facility).

Gender Analysis:

The purpose of a gender analysis is to ensure the PACT is a valid predictor of recidivism for both male and female youth. For the gender validation, two sub-samples of youth who were assessed and remained in the community (6 and 12 months) were divided into males and females.

- ✚ 26,643 males were assessed and remained in the community, tracked 6 months
- ✚ 5,677 males were assessed and remained in the community, tracked 12 months
- ✚ Results for the 6 and 12 month samples were identical

Risk to re-offend, as assessed by the PACT, was a significant predictor of re-offending, validating the PACT for predicting the recidivism of male youth.

- ✚ 9,682 females were assessed and remained in the community tracked 6 months
- ✚ 2,455 females were assessed and remained in the community, tracked 12 months
- ✚ Results for the 6 and 12 month samples were identical

Risk to re-offend, as assessed by the PACT, was a significant predictor of re-offending, validating the PACT for predicting the recidivism of female youth.

*This was one of the first research studies finding an assessment instrument capable of predicting female re-offending for an entire female sample. Previous research was forced to divide female samples into offending trajectories, called gendered pathways, to illustrate significance of “traditional” offending. Some scholars argue for the need to divide females into those that offend similar to the ways, and for similar reasons, of male offenders, from those females who are mainly co-defendants or offend as the result of influences from more powerful male boyfriends/partners. This analysis shows the PACT to be a valid predictor of male and female recidivism and eliminates the need or argument for any type of “gender-specific” assessment.

The male and female sub-samples were next assessed (separately) as to whether the official criminal history or the social history was driving the predictive power of the PACT. Both the criminal history and the social history scores were significant predictors of recidivism. However, the strength of the relationship between social history and recidivism was stronger than the relationship between criminal history and recidivism, for both males and females.

*As the social history is composed of dynamic, changeable factors (criminogenic needs), this study illustrates the possibility of rehabilitation and the reduction of

recidivism. The social history score can be lowered (reducing criminogenic needs), while the criminal history score can only increase (once an offense is in my history, it can not be removed). As the social history score has a stronger relationship to recidivism than the criminal history score, there is great promise in the ability to successfully reduce re-offending through individualized delinquency interventions.

Social History Analysis:

The male and female sub-samples were analyzed (separately) with regard to select social history variables.

Physical abuse history, sexual abuse history, drug use history, alcohol use history, school suspensions/expulsions, number of teachers/coaches the youth feels comfortable talking to, number of positive adult non-family/school/employment relationships, antisocial peer associations, history of running away, parental supervision, and white/non-white were included in the analysis.

For female youth assessed and tracked 12 months:

Females with a history of running away, those with less positive adult non-family/school/employment relationships, and non-white females were more likely to recidivate. The remaining variables listed above were not significant predictors of female recidivism.

For male youth assessed and tracked 12 months:

Males with more delinquent peers, drug history, school suspensions, inadequate parental supervision, and non-white males were more likely to recidivate. The remaining variables listed above were not significant predictors of male recidivism.

*This analysis shows that while the PACT is a significant predictor of male and female recidivism, there are different factors leading to the likelihood a male or female will recidivate.

Race analysis:

The overall risk score, as assessed by the PACT, was shown to be a significant predictor of re-offending for both white and “non-white” youth who are assessed and subsequently remain in the community. Both criminal history and social history are significant. The strength of the relationship between social history and recidivism is greater than the relationship between criminal history and recidivism for both white and “non-white” youth. This, again, shows the importance of rehabilitation and the ability of reducing criminogenic needs. This analysis removes the need or argument for any “culturally-specific” assessment instrument.

Violent Offending:

The overall risk score, as assessed by the PACT, was shown to be a significant predictor of a violent offense for youth assessed who subsequently remain in the community (a violent offense was strictly limited to murder/manslaughter, attempted murder/manslaughter, felony sexual battery, armed robbery, and aggravated assault).

Youth assessed as higher risk to re-offend are not just more likely to commit a new offense; they are significantly more likely to commit a new violent offense.

Michael Baglivio, Ph.D. completed his doctoral work in December 2007 at the University of Florida in the Department of Criminology, Law, & Society. He has a Bachelor of Science in psychology, a Master of Health Sciences in rehabilitation counseling, and a Master of Arts in sociology, all from the University of Florida. Michael is currently a co-Associate Project Director on a field demonstration grant sponsored by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention involving the effectiveness of various treatments of juvenile offending youth with maltreatment histories. His research interests include criminological theory, risk assessment, and life-course criminology.