

**SAVRY IMPLEMENTATION IN  
LOUISIANA:  
USE OF RISK/NEEDS  
ASSESSMENTS IN PROBATION**

**PRESENTATION AT THE “TOGETHER WE CAN”  
CONFERENCE, LAFAYETTE, LA**

Gina Vincent, Ph.D., National Youth  
Screening & Assessment Project (NYSAP)

# Outline

- Introduction - Potential usefulness of Risk/Needs Assessments in Probation
- The SAVRY
  - ▣ Description
  - ▣ Research Evidence & Admissibility
- Use of SAVRY Information
  - ▣ Pre-D Reports/recommendations
  - ▣ Case Planning/Service Delivery
- Court Monitoring

# Research Evidence: Best Practices

## Emerging consensus on the characteristics of effective programming for young offenders. What we know:

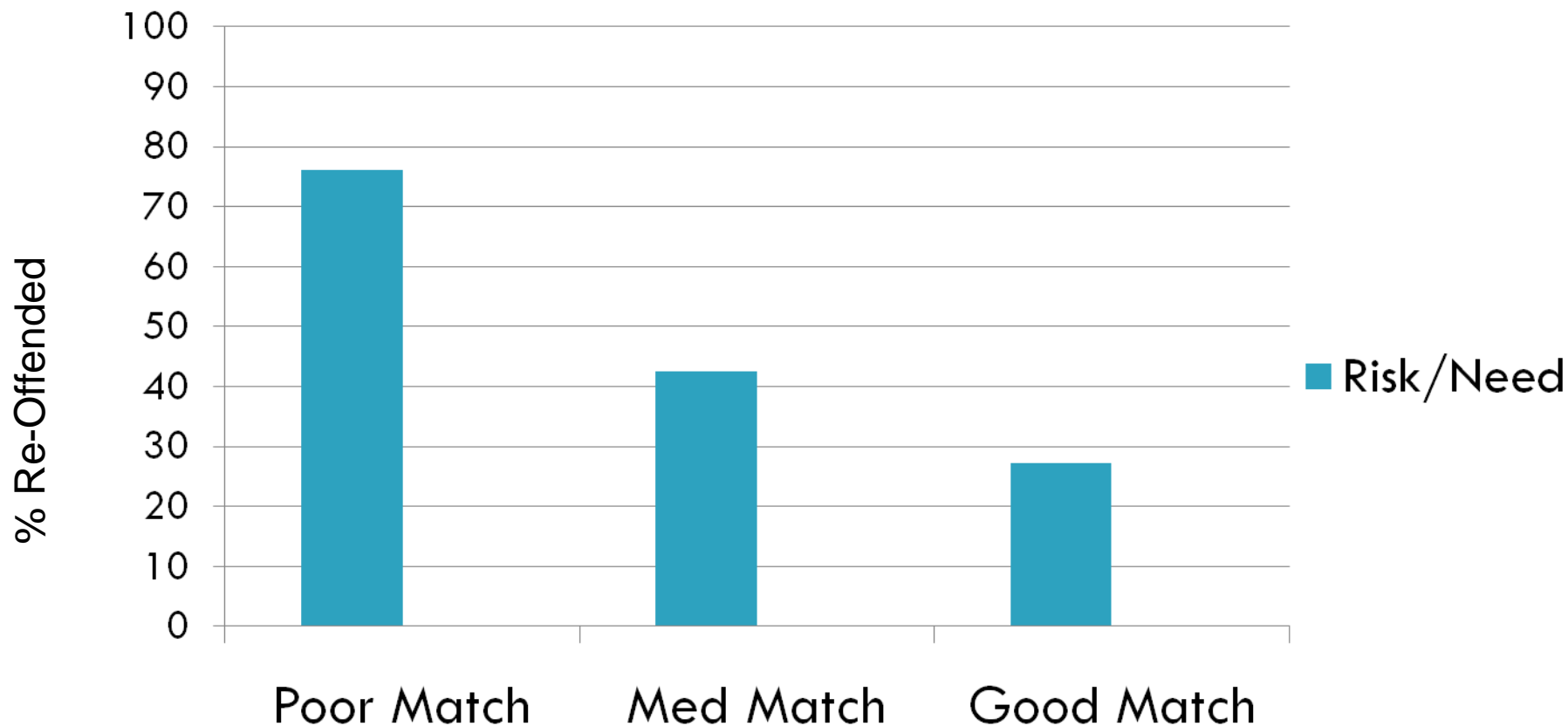
- ▣ Punitive sanctions without services **do not** have a significant effect on re-offending (Gatti, Tremblay et al., 2009)
- ▣ When services are **matched** to youths' crime-producing (criminogenic) needs – the lower the chance of repeat offending
- ▣ Mixing high risk youth with low risk youth can make low risk youth worse
- ▣ In other words, the **right** services for the **right** youths

# RESULTS OF COST/BENEFIT RESEARCH

## BENEFITS PER DOLLAR INVESTED

- For ever \$1.00 spent on the following services, you save ---
  - Functional Family Therapy - \$28.34
  - Multisystemic Family Therapy- \$28.81
  - Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care- \$43.70
  - Adolescent Diversion Project- \$24.92
  - Juvenile Boot Camps- \$0.81
  - Scared Straight - \$-477.75 (NET LOSS)

# Potential for Case Management if tool is Implemented Properly (Vieira et al., 2009)



Match based on # of Services Given in Response to a Youths' Risk/Need Factor

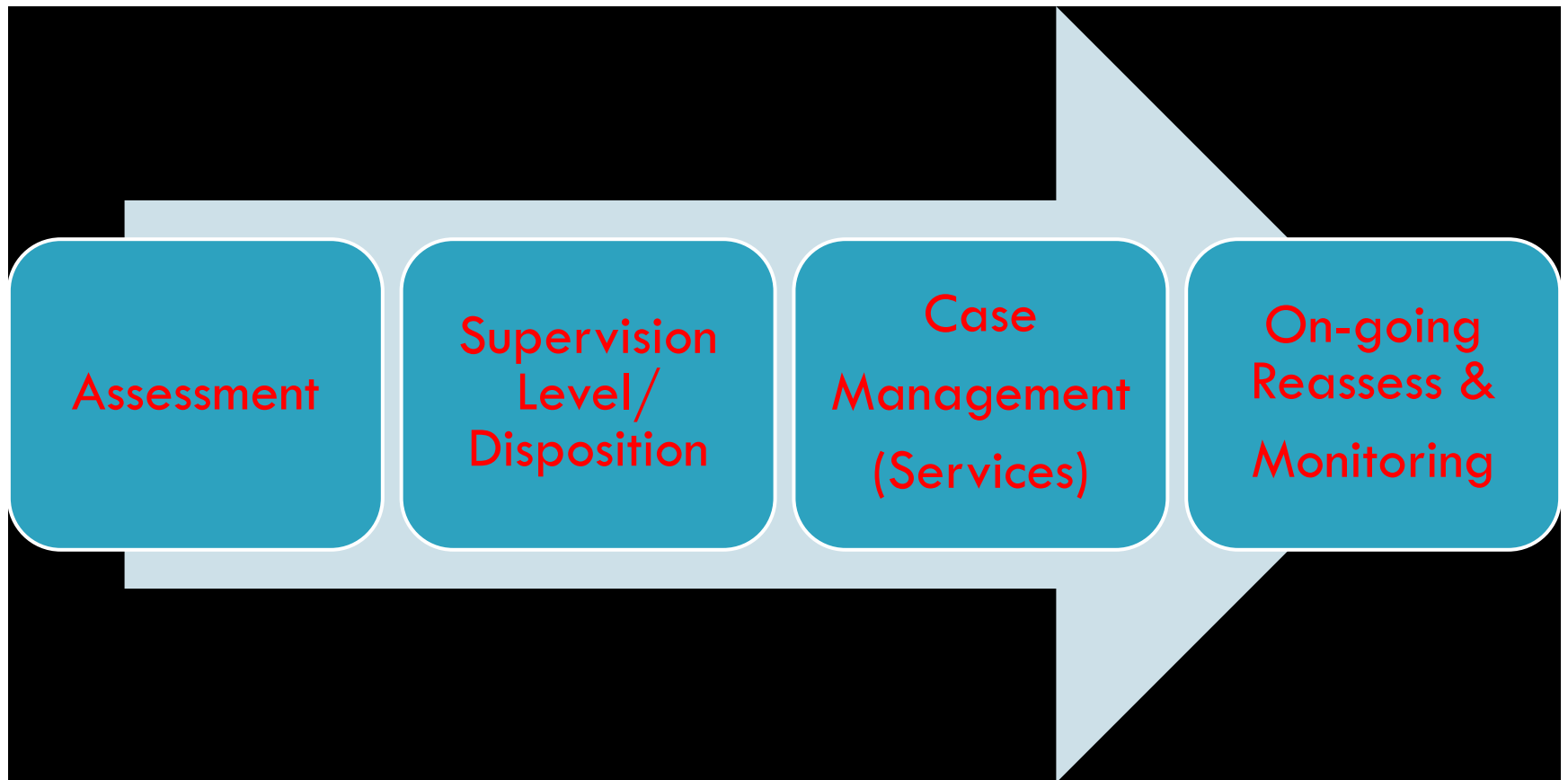
# How Risk/Needs Assessment can Help

- Identify youth at highest risk for re-offending and *guide intervention* efforts that could
  - ▣ *Prevent* later violence and reoffending
  - ▣ *Reduce risk of future harm* among youths who have recently engaged in harmful aggressive behavior
  - ▣ *Reduce costs* to: victims, service providers, JJ system
- **Intervention efforts** include:
  - ▣ Placement/disposition decisions
  - ▣ Referral to appropriate services/programs
  - ▣ Monitoring/supervision level

# Cost-Savings

- Proper implementation of a risk/needs assessment can save costs by...
  - ▣ Reducing the number of costly assessments when these aren't warranted,
  - ▣ Not recommending services for youth who **do not** need them,
  - ▣ Reducing costly out-of-home placement when it is unnecessary for addressing the risks and needs of the youth, and
  - ▣ Guiding case plans to reduce chances of re-offending

# Four-Step Process





# Decision Points for Use

- Pre-adjudication
  - ▣ Not recommended without information-sharing agreements in place --- potential for self-incrimination
- Post-adjudication/Pre-Disposition
  - ▣ Ideal use – considered in disposition
- Post-Disposition
  - ▣ Essential Use

# SOME IMPORTANT CONCEPTS



# Elements of a Good Risk for Re-Offending Assessment



# Some Terms

- **Risk** – likelihood of future offending
- A **risk factor** is anything that increases the probability that a person will cause harm or will re-offend.
  - ▣ Static Risk Factors – do not change
  - ▣ Dynamic Risk Factors (criminogenic *needs*) – changeable, targets for services & intervention
- A **protective factor or strength** - something that decreases the potential harmful effect of a risk factor

# Examples

## □ Static Risk Factors

- Age of first violent act\*

Number of prior arrests

- Single-parent household

Exposure to violence

## □ Dynamic Risk or Criminogenic Needs Factors

- Impulsivity

Callous/Unemotional\*

- Inconsistent/Lax Discipline\*

conduct disorder\*

## □ Protective Factors

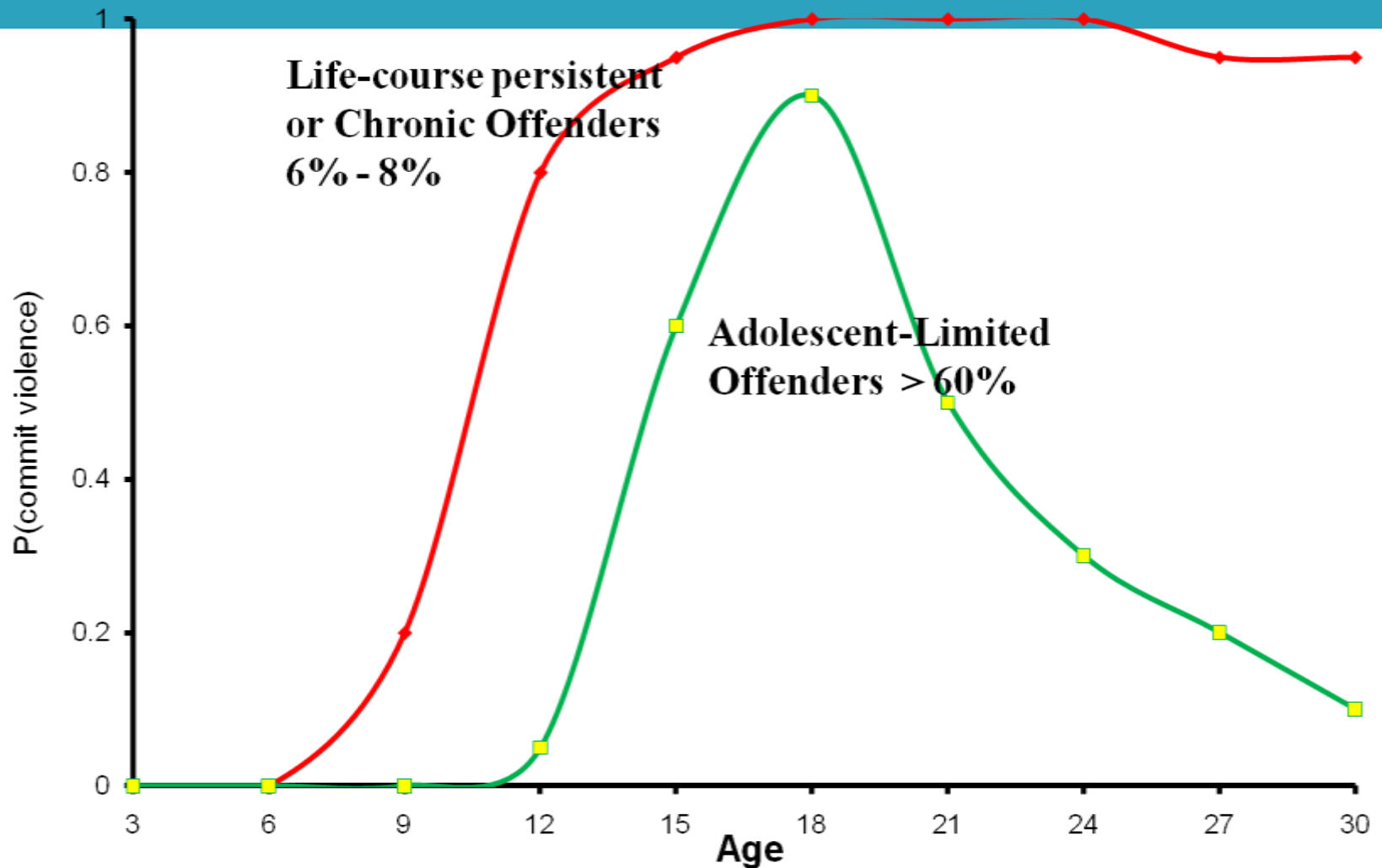
- Social Support

- Strong attachment to school

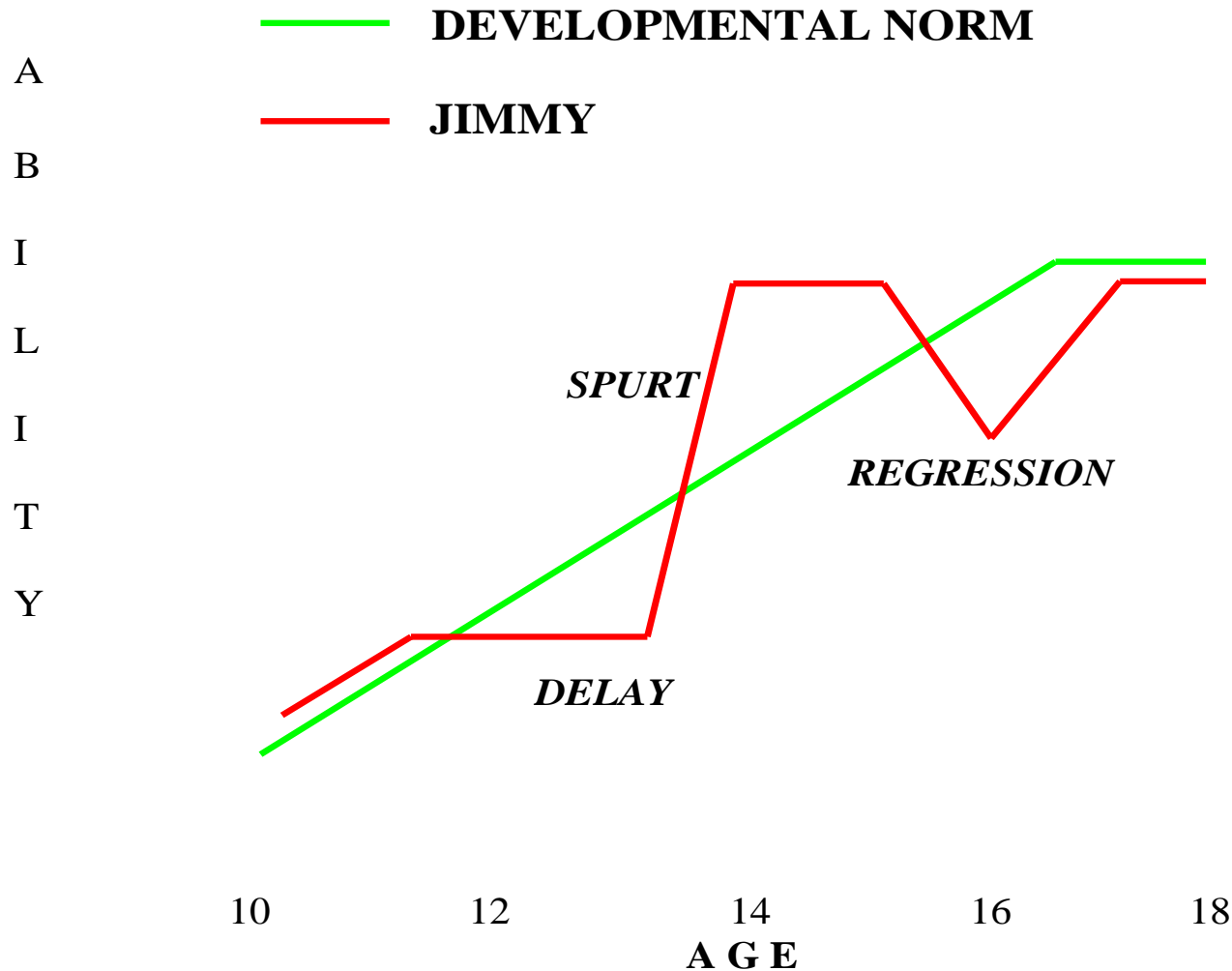
- Pro-social Involvement

# Offending Desists for Most Male Adolescents

(Reference group = Community males; Farrington, 1995; Loeber et al., 1991  
Moffitt, 1993, Moffitt & Caspi, 2001)



# Development Does Not Proceed Evenly Across Adolescence



# Application of Developmental Concepts

- For JJ personnel and courts, these developmental facts make estimates of risk of future violence more difficult...
  - ▣ Risk assessments should be seen as having limited “shelf-life” for most youths
  - ▣ Tools should use a variety of evidence-based risk factors
  - ▣ Tools should include risk factors capable of change
  - ▣ Re-assessment is essential



# THE SAVRY



# Why the SAVRY?

- Use of risk factors based on recent research
- Developmental approach
- Not jurisdiction-specific
- Structured Professional Judgment
- Considerable research evidence by independent parties ~ Evidence-based Assessment
  - ▣ Inter-rater reliability
  - ▣ Predictive Validity

# The Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY)

(Bartel, Borum, & Forth, 2000, 2003, 2006)

- A 30-item tool that includes
  - ▣ Historical factors,
  - ▣ Social/contextual factors,
  - ▣ Individual/clinical risk factors, and
  - ▣ Protective factors
  - ▣ Non-Historical Items rated Moderate to High = focus for intervention/case planning
- Final risk rating for likelihood of future..
  - ▣ Violence
  - ▣ Delinquency (non-violent re-offending)

# Defining Risk Levels: Final Risk Ratings

## □ **Low risk**

- Few risk factors, or few salient risk factors
- Low intensity management/supervision sufficient
- If left alone or with minimal management, would likely not be violent and not re-offend seriously

## □ **High risk**

- Many risk factors, or some critical risk factors
- High intensity management/supervision necessary
- **If left alone or with minimal management**, would likely be violent and not re-offend seriously

## □ **Moderate risk** - neither high nor low risk

# Final Risk Rating: Structured Professional Judgment

- Unlike tools that result in a score that is expected to apply equally to all individuals – the SAVRY technique recognizes that the question is “How do these risk factors apply to **this** individual?”
  - ▣ What risk factors are present?
  - ▣ How do these risk factors affect **this** person?
  - ▣ How are they relevant to **this** person’s violent behavior?
  - ▣ Which risk factors are most salient, or of greatest concern?
  - ▣ What treatment, supervision, or management strategies can we apply to these risk factors?

# Reliability

- Inter-rater Reliability – The degree to which independent test administrators agree in their scoring of test data.
- Considerations – What is the empirical inter-rater reliability for a specific test being used?
- When inter-rater agreement is high → **NOT subjective**

# Agreement: Inter-rater Reliability

- The following are critical values for determining the level of agreement:
  - ▣ Statistical index (ICC)  $\geq .75$  = excellent;
  - ▣  $.60 \leq \text{ICC} < .75$  = good;
  - ▣  $.40 \leq \text{ICC} < .60$  = moderate;
  - ▣  $\text{ICC} < .40$  = poor (Fleiss, 1986).
- ICC – Intra-class correlation coefficient (preferred measure of agreement)

# Inter-rater Agreement from Caddo & Calcasieu Parish (55 cases)

<b>SAVRY Index</b>	<b>ICC<sub>1</sub></b>
<b>Overall Risk Rating (L, M, H)</b>	<b>.71</b>
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>.86</b>
<b>Historical</b>	<b>.79</b>
<b>Social/Contextual</b>	<b>.70</b>
<b>Individual</b>	<b>.88</b>
<b>Protective</b>	<b>.82</b>

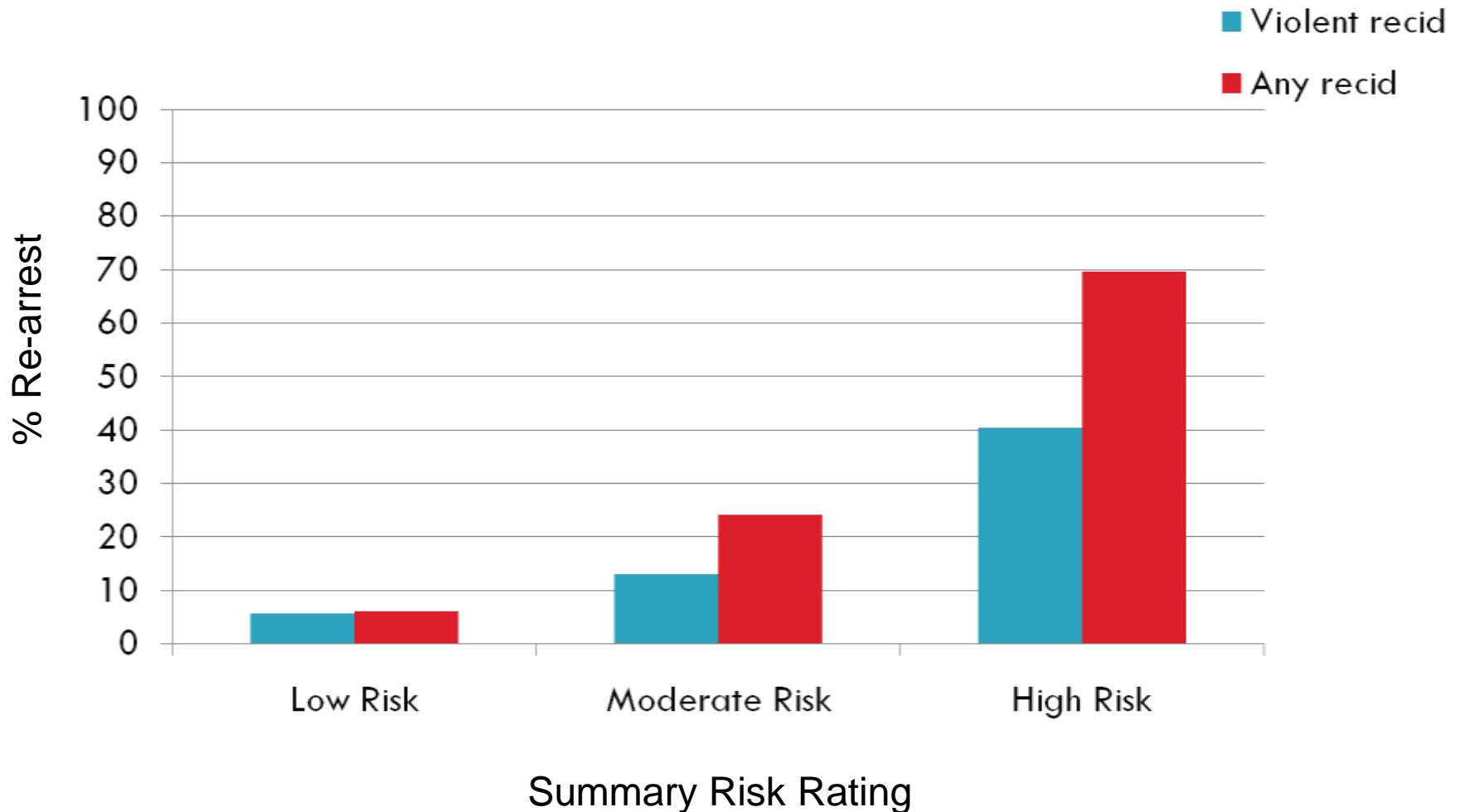


# Validity

- “The accuracy of a test...the degree to which a test provides a true measurement of the phenomenon being assessed.”
  
- Is the test measuring what it says that it is measuring?
  - ▣ In this case – are ratings on the SAVRY associated with re-offending?
  
- Is it being administered appropriately?

# SAVRY'S PREDICTIVE VALIDITY:

## Re-offending (Abramowitz & Gretton, 2002)



# Empirically Based Tests: Admissibility

## □ *Daubert* criteria

### □ Testability or Falsifiability

- The SAVRY has good validity & reliability

### □ Known error rates

- Calculated from reliability estimates, which are high for the SAVRY, meaning error is low.

### □ Subjected to peer review & publication

- The SAVRY has 15 to 20 peer reviewed publications, most by independent parties.

### □ General acceptance among experts in the field

# Training

- All probation officers using the SAVRY in Louisiana MfC sites have completed...
  - ▣ Training (1 to 2-days) regarding how to rate items and how to use the SAVRY in disposition recommendations and case planning
  - ▣ At least two practice cases w/supervisor feedback
- A system of checks and balances has been implemented in each office
- On-going office/booster training

# What the SAVRY Does NOT Do

- It is NOT prescriptive – service delivery and decision-making is part of the policy, which has been customized for each office
- It is NOT a Mental Health Assessment
  - ▣ It is also not designed to identify potential mental health problems in need of an assessment
- It will NOT cover **needs** that are unrelated to future offending (special education, depression, etc.)
- It is NOT appropriate for identifying risk for sexual offending

**USING SAVRY RESULTS FOR  
DISPOSITION  
RECOMMENDATIONS &  
CASE PLANNING**



# Providing Recommendations to the Court

- Reports to the court should provide...
  - A narrative social history covering content related to the youth's risk and criminogenic need factors
  - A determination of risk level to recommend disposition and supervision level
  - Enough detail to support service/program recommendations ---- this should be based on criminogenic needs

# Risk Statement

- *A number of risk and protective factors associated with future general re-offending and violence in youth have been consistently identified in the literature. The Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY) summarizes the available research and expert opinion. This instrument was used to assist in estimating the risk of future re-offending and violence for this youth.*



# Risk Statement (cont.)

- *At the present time, \_\_\_\_\_ presents (Low, Moderate or High) risk for re-offending and presents (Low, Moderate, or High) risk for violence.*
- *The following risk/needs factors were identified as definitely present and are contributing to \_\_\_\_ delinquency:*
  - ▣ *List the Social Contextual factors rated High (in some cases may want to include Moderate)*
  - ▣ *List the Individual and clinical factors rated High (in some cases may want to include Moderate)*
  - ▣ *May list Protective factors that are potentially related to lowering risk*

# Pre-D Recommendations

- Document recommendations for disposition, services and case management, and level of supervision
  - Higher levels of risk will generally indicate greater degree of external control (i.e., residential, length of disposition, level of supervision and monitoring in the community when released).
- List interventions and management strategies available in the community that can address the youth's
  - social/contextual risk factors (dynamic)
  - individual/clinical risk factors (dynamic)

# Case Planning/Management

- Level of Supervision
  - ▣ Policy: Assigned initially based on SAVRY risk level
- Service Matrix
  - ▣ Specific to a geographical unit
- Case plans
  - ▣ Policy: suggest limiting service referrals to the most pressing 3 risk factors to address first – update as needed
- Re-assessment every 6 months or at change in status.
- Monitoring -- Updating case plans

# Potential Problems

## Problems can come with use of risk assessments....

- Including only items with unchanging risk factors (e.g., juvenile record) OR overly relying on this information
- By those who did not complete all of the training
- That were not completed exactly as explained in the test manual (e.g., failure to gather collateral information & records – basing conclusions solely on youths' reports)
- Putting youth in services that are not related to their risk level and criminogenic needs.

# Importance of Court Monitoring

- ❑ Was all the essential information gathered to complete a valid assessment? (Parent/ caretaker interview, youth interview, RECORDS)
- ❑ Check that the results of the assessment aren't at odds with the proposed case plan (were services selected based on the changeable risk factors/crim needs)?
- ❑ Is the youth getting services or dispositions in agreement with their risk level and changeable risk factors?
- ❑ On-going monitoring of service provision – is the youth getting the services necessary to decrease his/her risk?

# Summary: Potential Benefits to Courts and the System

- Connecting youth to the most appropriate disposition and services that target ONLY specific needs at the proper intensity may lead to:
  - ▣ Improved chance of reducing risk --- recidivism,
  - ▣ Successful service completion,
  - ▣ Early termination, and
  - ▣ Cost-Savings
- Data gathering and reporting - OJJ
  - ▣ Service provider & JJ accountability
  - ▣ Resource allocation