



The Predictive Validity of the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY)

Stephanie R. Penney¹, M.A., Zina Lee², Ph.D., Marlene M. Moretti¹, Ph.D., & Patrick Bartel³, Ph.D.

¹Simon Fraser University, Burnaby BC

²The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa AL

³Youth Forensic Psychiatric Services, Burnaby BC



Introduction

Many risk assessment instruments have been criticized on the basis that they are not sufficiently sensitive to dynamic factors that may change over time (Borum, 2000). The recently developed adolescent risk assessment instrument, the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY; Borum, Bartel, & Forth, 2002), is an exception as it incorporates dynamic, changeable factors in its assessments of risk – a particularly important feature for use in adolescent populations (Witt, 2002). However, to date there is little information attesting to the reliability and validity of the SAVRY, with only one published study showing that the SAVRY was predictive of violent offending over a one year follow-up period (Catchpole & Grettton, 2003).

Furthermore, compared to the corresponding adult literature, there exists less information regarding the risk factors that are reliably associated with youth violence (Herrenkohl et al., 2000). Particularly lacking are well-documented risk factors associated with violence risk in adolescent girls (Odgers & Moretti, 2002). The current study represents an important first step to refining our knowledge regarding salient domains of risk for female populations, and will serve the ultimate goal of improving and tailoring current risk assessment measures to include gender-specific variables.

The Current Study

The focus of the current study was to (1) investigate the reliability and predictive validity of the SAVRY in a clinical sample of adolescent boys and girls, and (2) increase our knowledge regarding the gender discrepancies that may exist in the predictive utility of particular risk factors. A key question was whether the general risk rating and domains of risk (i.e., historical, individual/clinical, social/contextual) on the SAVRY are equally predictive of violent and non-violent antisocial behaviors across gender. Towards this goal, we used both self-report and official indices of aggressive and criminal behaviors at a two-year follow up mark from the date that the SAVRY was administered.

Method

Participants: Participants at Time 1 included 144 adolescent boys and girls (80 males, 64 females) between the ages of 12 and 18 ($M = 15.3$; $SD = 1.5$) gathered from custody centres (53%), a provincial assessment centre (44%), and probation offices (3%) in British Columbia. Participants at Time 2 were 111 adolescents (55 males, 56 females; 79% of the original sample) with a mean age of 17.6 ($SD = 1.5$). Of these 111 youth, 71 had also been successfully contacted and interviewed via telephone at the time of the current study. Average length of follow-up was 26.0 months ($SD = 3.6$) for the phone interview, and all criminal histories were collected at exactly 24 months following Time 1.

Materials: Time 1

The SAVRY is a 30-item guide designed to assess risk for violence in adolescent boys and girls that includes historical (e.g., past violence, child maltreatment), social/contextual (e.g., peer delinquency and rejection), and individual/clinical (e.g., substance use) risk factors as well as protective factors. It follows the structured clinical approach to risk assessment and generates a clinical risk rating based on a review of items and clinical judgment.

Materials: Time 2

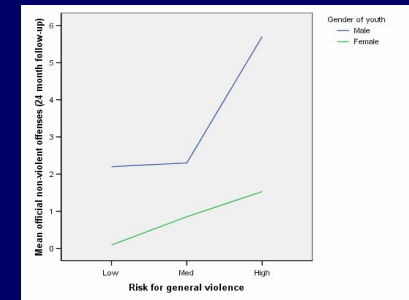
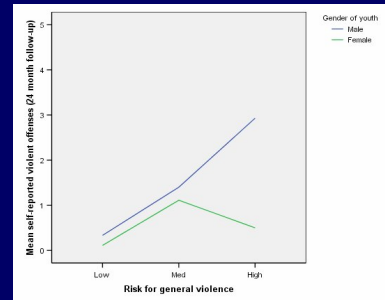
The Self-Report of Offending (SRO) was adapted for use in this study based on the more widely studied Self-Report of Delinquency (Huizinga & Elliot, 1986; Piquero et al., 2002). The current measure included 15 items assessing the youth's involvement in violent (e.g., assault and weapons charges) and non-violent (e.g., narcotics and property crimes) offenses over the past 24 months.

Official Arrest Data was accessed through the Ministry of Children and Family Development official records system in British Columbia. CORNET record checks 24 months following release were used and coded for violent and non-violent recidivism.

Bivariate Relationships: Official Charges & Self-Reported Offenses

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. SAVRY Historical	--								
2. SAVRY Social/Contextual	.35*	--							
3. SAVRY Individual/Clinical	.44**	.37**	--						
4. SAVRY General Risk Rating	.58**	.31**	.67**	--					
5. SAVRY Protective Factors	-.15	-.35**	-.51**	-.34**	--				
6. # New Violent Offenses	.18	.15	.21*	.29**	.08	--			
7. # New Non-Violent Offenses	.28**	.16	.37**	.29**	-.02	.41*	--		
8. # Self-reported Violent Offenses	.28*	.02	.49**	.30**	-.20	.38**	.52**	--	
9. # Self-reported Non-Violent Offenses	.24*	.14	.45**	.25*	-.22	.27**	.53**	.66**	--

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$



Results & Discussion

The central goal of the current study was to investigate the predictive relationships between pertinent domains of risk (i.e., historical, contextual, and individual) and both violent and non-violent offenses (official and self-reported). Another important aim of the study was to explore gender differences in the predictive utility of these domains of risk, thereby increasing our knowledge of the factors associated with violence and delinquency in girls.

Findings indicate that the general risk rating on the SAVRY moderately predicted future violent and non-violent offenses. Furthermore, the historical and individual risk factors were moderately associated with future acts of violence and delinquency. In contrast, the social/contextual risk factors on the SAVRY did not appear to contribute to the prediction of future antisocial behavior. Finally, the protective factors on the SAVRY did not show significant inverse relationships to future offending, although the relationships for self-reported offending were in the correct direction.

Importantly, results suggest that the SAVRY does not operate comparably across gender. As shown in the figures above, the general risk rating did not operate optimally in girls compared to its functioning in boys. Furthermore, each of the risk domains (i.e., historical, contextual, and individual) showed a similar pattern when examined separately in boys and girls: in each case the strength of the relationship between the SAVRY and outcome was significantly stronger in males. These findings underscore the importance of examining gender differences in the study of risk for violence, and caution against the assumption that risk factors operate in an equivalent manner across gender.

Acknowledgments & Contact Information

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