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# Girls Study Group

*Understanding and Responding to Girls' Delinquency*

Jeff Slowikowski, Acting Administrator

## Suitability of Assessment Instruments for Delinquent Girls

By Susan Brumbaugh, Jennifer L. Hardison Walters, and Laura A. Winterfield

*According to data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, from 1991 to 2000, arrests of girls increased more (or decreased less) than arrests of boys for most types of offenses. By 2004, girls accounted for 30 percent of all juvenile arrests. However, questions remain about whether these trends reflect an actual increase in girls' delinquency or changes in societal responses to girls' behavior. To find answers to these questions, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention convened the Girls Study Group to establish a theoretical and empirical foundation to guide the development, testing, and dissemination of strategies to reduce or prevent girls' involvement in delinquency and violence.*

*The Girls Study Group Series, of which this bulletin is a part, presents the Group's findings. The series examines issues such as patterns of offending among adolescents and how they differ for girls and boys; risk and protective factors associated with delinquency, including gender differences; and the causes and correlates of girls' delinquency.*

Juvenile justice policymakers have focused growing attention on girls in recent years, in part because of an increase in female arrests and as a result of federal requirements in the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. Although the overall total of juvenile arrests in the United

States dropped about 22 percent between 1996 and 2005, arrests of males decreased 29 percent, whereas arrests of females decreased only 14 percent. Furthermore, male arrests for violent crimes decreased more substantially (28 percent) than did female arrests (10 percent) (Zahn et al.,



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2008). Although their involvement in the justice system has been increasing, girls received scant attention until OJJDP required states to “develop and adopt policies to prohibit gender bias in placement and treatment” (Bownes and Albert, 1996).<sup>1</sup> Meeting this mandate requires that practitioners and policy-makers understand gender differences that may lead to system biases.

Standardized instruments are tools juvenile justice practitioners use to identify individuals who pose some sort of risk (e.g., recidivism) or to identify problem areas (e.g., substance abuse, mental health). These instruments can facilitate the collection of preliminary information critical to security and treatment decisions.

Within the justice system, instruments can be used for various purposes and at many points in time. For example, instruments can be used—

- Prior to sentencing—to inform placement decisions or identify youth who may be appropriate candidates for diversion programs.
- In correctional facilities and probation departments—to inform appropriate

security classifications or treatment and aid in release planning.

- In treatment facilities—to guide case managers in planning services and assessing treatment progress.

In each of these instances, practitioners can use standardized instruments once for initial screening purposes or at regular intervals to gauge changes over time and guide modifications to security levels or treatment services.

To make appropriate processing decisions (filing, adjudication, detention), juvenile justice practitioners—including judges, attorneys, case managers, and corrections and probation staff—may rely in part on standardized instruments to determine the risks and treatment needs of youth entering and involved in the justice system. Using such tools helps systematize decision-making criteria across the juvenile justice system.

Recently, because of the increase in the numbers of girls in the juvenile justice system and heightened public awareness about issues concerning girls and gender,<sup>2</sup> practitioners and policymakers have begun to question whether the instruments currently in use are appropriate for girls. Literature has indicated that gender is an important variable in understanding delinquent behavior and must be addressed when developing assessment tools.

### Background and Methods

No research has systematically examined the extent to which existing adolescent instruments used in the juvenile justice system are equally effective for girls and boys. OJJDP’s Girls Study Group (GSG) conducted such a study and has summarized the findings in this bulletin.<sup>3</sup>

#### Authors’ Note

The purpose of this review is to determine the extent to which assessment instruments used with at-risk and justice-involved youth are equally appropriate and effective in assessing girls and boys. The authors reviewed hundreds of instruments across a wide variety of assessment areas to examine considerations of gender in the development of each instrument as well as subsequent research that involves analyses by gender.

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## Examining Two Categories of Instruments

Two broad types of instruments were relevant to the GSG examination: **risk assessment instruments** used to assess the risk of outcomes (e.g., recidivism) and **treatment-focused instruments** used to assist in the screening and diagnosis of conditions (e.g., mental health disorders).

**Risk assessment instruments** are used to predict or assess the potential risk of various outcomes. These instruments are usually developed by analyzing historical cases to determine the factors that best predict the subsequent behavior of interest. For example, a traditional risk assessment tool developed for use in correctional facilities might be based on a historical sample of juveniles in the justice system that is used to determine the characteristics that best predicted subsequent offending. These characteristics might include “static” factors, such as offense type or prior justice system involvement, and “dynamic” factors, such as education level or mental health status. These instruments are usually tested on the “typical” juvenile justice population, composed largely of boys, without an oversampling of girls.

**Treatment-focused instruments** identify conditions without predicting subsequent behavior. These instruments typically identify the presence of mental health conditions and substance abuse problems, but they may also measure positive and negative behaviors. Some instruments perform a global needs assessment to determine possible areas for treatment and services. Because the risk and protective factors, conditions, and disorders that these instruments identify can differ by gender, examining the effectiveness of instruments with regard to gender is essential. For example, using a mental health screening

instrument that does not appropriately consider gender may result in a missed opportunity for service or placement of a child in an inappropriate treatment program.

## Considerations When Examining Gender

Two main factors should be considered when examining gender-based performance of instruments:

- Whether the instrument has **gender-based development** (e.g., gender-specific norming or validation,<sup>4</sup> gender-specific instruments or items, or gender-specific scoring systems).
- The results of **gender-based analyses** that have been performed (e.g., gender differences in scores or psychometrics, that is, tests to determine the reliability or validity of the instrument).

Some background on each of these factors is described here.

**Gender-based development.** The primary type of gender-based instrument development is the process of norming or validating an instrument separately by gender. The terms “norming” and “validation” should be distinguished because they are applied differently for the two types of instruments described above. Treatment-focused instruments are generally described as being normed, whereas risk assessment instruments that predict risk are generally described as being validated.

A normed instrument allows the user to compare a numerical score of a particular individual to the average scores of the norming population representative of the person being tested. Ideally, these average scores (also



called norms) are based on a nationally representative sample or a representative sample of persons who exhibit the condition of interest (e.g., mental health condition). Some instruments also provide scores separately by gender.

Many commercial instruments indicate norming information and subgroup norms on their Web sites and in their manuals. Many instruments offer separate norms by gender, but gender norms are not always necessary—analysis sometimes indicates no need for them. Past research and instrument reviews also often provide helpful information about gender norming for a specific instrument.

Researchers who develop risk assessment instruments do not usually use the term norming but instead reference instrument validation. In this context, validation describes how well the items or total scores predict risk.<sup>5</sup> For risk assessment instruments, validation usually involves determining item

## How Gender Can Affect Classification and Diagnosis

When instruments that were developed and tested with general delinquent populations are applied to girls, the instrument's performance may be negatively affected, even if the study samples on which the test was conducted included girls. General delinquent populations typically include a large number of boys. When instruments developed in these populations are used with girls, several concerns arise:

- An instrument may not accurately identify negative behaviors (e.g., offending) if the instrument does not account for the small number of girls who might exhibit the behavior.
- An instrument may misclassify problematic behaviors (e.g., if girls are clustered into one category, such as low risk, an instrument may not adequately identify high-risk girls because they appear to be at low risk compared with boys).
- An instrument may not distinguish subgroups (e.g., it may not distinguish girls at high and low risk).
- An instrument may not identify or may misidentify the needs and strengths of girls because it does not contain items that are particularly relevant to girls (e.g., girls may be strengthened by family or social support networks).

weights and total scores in a “construction sample.” These weights and scores are later confirmed in a second “validation sample.” An instrument has been validated by gender when research shows that it can predict risk equally for boys and girls.

Gender-based development can also involve the creation of gender-specific scoring systems under which the specific items or questions on the instrument are scored differently for girls and boys (as opposed to gender-based norms, which involve different interpretations of the total score). Another aspect of gender-based development involves the creation of gender-specific items or, in some cases, completely separate versions of the instrument for girls and boys.

**Gender-based analysis.** As with gender-based development, gender-based analyses conducted in subsequent research can provide helpful indications of how

well an instrument works for girls. Indicators of gender-based performance include studies of instrument psychometrics, such as validity (i.e., whether the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure) and reliability (i.e., whether the instrument is stable over time or across different raters). Factors such as validity and reliability should be consistent across gender. Additionally, if subsequent research reveals that an instrument shows expected gender differences (e.g., gender differences the instrument reveals are consistent with existing literature), it can be used to confirm the appropriateness of an instrument for girls.

In the absence of research that indicates how well instruments perform by gender, practitioners cannot know whether such instruments accurately assess risks and needs for girls. Practitioners concerned about such issues need a resource that examines gender-based performance across a

wide variety of instruments so that they can make better informed decisions about which instruments to use with their populations. This bulletin summarizes a preliminary examination of the gender-based performance of risk assessment and treatment instruments for delinquent girls.

## Instrument Review Process

To assess whether risk assessment and treatment-focused instruments that are gender responsive exist for delinquent girls, the authors conducted a comprehensive examination of relevant instruments. The examination had two primary phases: a preliminary search for instruments and an intensive examination of instruments that met the inclusion criteria.

The authors conducted the initial literature searches between May 2006 and February 2007. To ensure consistency of information across instruments and verify previously collected information, the authors conducted a comprehensive quality check and Web search for all instruments in January and February 2008. The findings presented here reflect the information the authors located on each instrument during the given timeframes.

The authors primarily examined instruments explicitly intended for use with youth involved in the justice system as well as instruments that address issues that these youth frequently face (e.g., suicide risk) regardless of whether the instruments were specifically developed for this population. Thus, instruments developed with community-based samples, but not necessarily intended for youth in the juvenile justice system, were also included.<sup>6</sup>

The authors limited their review to instruments in the following four categories

(the last three of which are treatment-focused instruments):

- Risk and risk/needs assessment instruments.
- Global needs assessment instruments.
- Substance abuse instruments.
- Mental health instruments.

The authors identified instruments through literature and Web searches and reference books. Books the authors consulted included *Assessing the Youthful Offender: Issues and Techniques* (Hoge and Andrews, 1996) and *Mental Health Screening and Assessment in Juvenile Justice* (Grisso, Vincent, and Seagrave, 2005).

The authors also solicited practitioner input through three sources. First, the authors capitalized on knowledge generated from a related GSG project—a review of programs for girls—and included instruments that program directors of female-targeted programs identified. Second, the authors included assessment instruments reported by

local program directors serving juveniles under the Federal Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative. Finally, the authors included submissions received from practitioners through the GSG Web site.

The preliminary search yielded an initial set of 327 instruments. Before conducting the intensive examination, 184 instruments were removed from the initial set, for a final total of 143 instruments. Reasons for exclusion included the following:

- Outdated or duplicate instruments ( $n = 14$ ). This set included instruments replaced by later versions, subscales of existing instruments, and those that measured against outdated criteria (e.g., the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition* [DSM-III] instead of the DSM-IV).
- Inappropriate instruments ( $n = 33$ ). This set included instruments intended for use with boys or adults, those exclusively used and tested on non-U.S. populations, and those used solely for research or prevalence studies (e.g., surveys).

- Instruments outside the project's scope ( $n = 92$ ). This set included instruments too broadly focused for common use with justice-involved youth (i.e., they did not fall into one of the four major categories: risk assessment, global needs assessment, substance use, or mental health).
- Instruments that could not be verified ( $n = 45$ ). This set included instruments for which the authors could not locate sufficient detail to either confirm the instrument's existence or conduct the examination.<sup>7</sup>

The authors cataloged information about each instrument in a spreadsheet. Sources of information included Web sites and documentation from instrument developers, existing instrument reviews (e.g., the *Mental Measurements Yearbook* and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism's *Guide to Assessing Alcohol Problems*), and literature searches (including article abstracts and full-text articles).

The authors considered an instrument to have favorable gender-based performance if it met at least one of the following criteria:

- Gender-based development. The instrument offers gender-specific norms or scoring, has gender-specific versions, or includes gender-specific items.
- Favorable gender-based analysis. Analysis indicated that the instrument's validity or reliability did not differ by gender, that its scores were not correlated with gender, or that gender differences the instrument revealed were consistent with the literature (e.g., girls scored higher on mental health issues and boys on physical aggression).



**An Online Search Tool**

OJJDP is supporting an online instrument search tool that will allow researchers and practitioners to find detailed and up-to-date information about the instruments included in this review. Go to: <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/programs/girlsdelinquency.html>.

For each instrument, the authors developed the following categories for findings:

- Favorable—The instrument had positive gender-based performance information.
- Unclear—The instrument had mixed or inconsistent gender-based performance information.
- Unfavorable—The instrument had negative gender-based performance information.
- Unknown—The instrument lacked gender information.

**Results**

The authors examined 143 instruments, with the following results:

- Favorable—73 instruments.

- Unclear—7 instruments.
- Unfavorable—8 instruments.
- Unknown—55 instruments.

Table 1 summarizes the overall findings as well as findings within the four categories, each of which is defined and presented in more detail below.

**Risk and Risk/Needs Assessment Instruments**

Justice system practitioners use risk assessment instruments to assess the probability of some future outcome of concern. Such instruments usually assess the likelihood of recidivism but can also examine the likelihood of probation revocation or institutional misbehavior. By estimating such probabilities, these instruments help practitioners make decisions about placement, security classification levels, and the timing of release. This category also includes combination “risk/needs assessment” instruments, which examine risk factors and treatment needs to determine a person’s risk level. The higher score—from either the risk assessment portion or the needs assessment portion of the instrument—determines the level of risk.<sup>8</sup>

This category includes instruments designed exclusively for assessing

justice-involved or at-risk youth. It includes general instruments developed for use across various jurisdictions and instruments created for a specific jurisdiction.

The authors reviewed a total of 35 risk assessment instruments and found 11 with favorable gender-based performance. Three instruments had an unfavorable gender-based analysis and 21 instruments had unknown gender-based performance information.

Six assessments with favorable gender-based performance were developed for use in a specific jurisdiction. The single-jurisdiction instruments may serve as promising models for other communities but must be locally validated to ensure that they appropriately assess risk, taking local policies and characteristics into consideration (see “Recommendations for Practitioners”).

**Global Needs Assessment Instruments**

Needs assessment instruments provide a broad-based assessment of youths’ problem areas requiring further follow-up. Many states and jurisdictions use a separate needs assessment instrument as a companion to their risk assessment instruments. Some commercially available global needs assessment instruments also exist.

**Table 1:** Summary of Gender-Based Findings Across All Instrument Types

Instrument Category	Number of Instruments	Gender-Based Performance			
		Favorable	Unclear	Unfavorable	Unknown
<b>All Instruments</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>55</b>
Risk Assessment Instruments	35	11	0	3	21
Needs Assessment Instruments	6	2	0	0	4
Substance Abuse Instruments	22	7	4	1	10
Mental Health Instruments	80	53	3	4	20

The authors reviewed six instruments in this category, and two met the criteria for determining favorable gender performance. For the remaining four instruments, the authors could not locate gender information.

### Substance Abuse Instruments

This category of instruments includes tools intended to detect alcohol or substance use, including the presence or severity of abuse, dependence, and problems associated with abuse. Some instruments include mental health indicators and can also be used to detect co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders.

Substance abuse instruments are appropriate for use with both at-risk and justice-involved youth. They can be administered at multiple points in time, including during initial intake and when needed to determine treatment progress for abusers.

The authors reviewed 22 instruments in this category; they found 7 that had favorable gender performance. Four substance abuse instruments had unclear or mixed gender analysis results and one showed unfavorable gender results. For the remaining 10 instruments, results were unknown or the authors could not locate sufficient information to determine gender performance.

### Mental Health Instruments

The final category of instruments covers a broad scope of topics within the mental health area, from disorders to positive functioning and adaptive behaviors. The authors reviewed a wide range of mental health instruments in the following subcategories: antisocial behavior, abuse and trauma, depression and suicide risk, behavior ratings, self-concept and self-esteem, social-emotional competence

and functioning, and general instruments that measure multiple disorders or clusters of symptoms.

Within this category, the authors reviewed 80 instruments, of which 53 were favorable with regard to gender performance. The authors identified three instruments with unclear gender performance and four instruments with unfavorable gender performance. Insufficient information was available to determine gender performance for the remaining 20 instruments.

### Discussion of Findings

Across all instrument types, findings regarding gender performance are encouraging. More than half (73) of the 143 instruments reviewed showed favorable gender-based analysis or provided gender-based development—the authors found favorable gender-based analysis for 25 instruments; 28 had gender-based development but no additional gender-based analysis; and 20 instruments met both criteria.

Of the four categories of instruments reviewed, the mental health instruments are most sensitive to gender concerns. Results for the risk assessment instruments were the least encouraging. Out of the 35 instruments reviewed, only 5 gender-appropriate instruments were developed for multiple jurisdictions. Although several jurisdiction-specific instruments showed favorable gender performance, the work and resources required to validate these instruments for use in other jurisdictions could be significant.

The other jurisdiction-specific risk assessment instruments are problematic either because their developers have not analyzed validity (i.e., the extent to which the instrument accurately predicts the intended outcome) separately by gender

or because researchers have found that the instrument is less valid when used for girls. These findings are especially worrisome because the consequences of misclassification for girls can be serious—both for the girls themselves (if their risk is overestimated) and potentially for public safety (if their risk is underestimated).

### Recommendations for Practitioners

Practitioners who want to assess girls' risks and treatment needs accurately face considerable barriers and unknowns. The online search tool provides information about many instruments and whether they evaluate girls appropriately. Many instruments are available, however, and literature on the subject is expansive and ever-growing. Local juvenile justice systems and community prevention programs should consider the following issues when selecting and administering instruments:

**The instrument's purpose.** When selecting instruments, practitioners must ensure that the instrument's purpose and their own reason for using it match. For example, they should not use a diagnostic-focused instrument to determine risk because these instruments were not developed to determine risk behaviors. Conversely, using a predictive risk assessment tool may not be sufficient to determine appropriate treatment for offending youth. Before making specific decisions about which instruments to select, practitioners may want to organize a planning session with staff who work with juveniles to discuss screening and assessment needs and solicit input on what is working and what is not.

**Gender performance.** Practitioners should check current instruments against the information contained

## Selecting Appropriate Risk and Needs Assessment Instruments

When selecting an instrument, ask the following questions:

- What do we want to accomplish? What are the decisions we want to make? Do we want to do an initial screening or an assessment? Are we trying to find an instrument to do an initial screening to decide who might need further assessment, or are we doing an assessment to determine who needs treatment or followup care?
- Are we interested in assessing a single factor or a host of factors? Are we interested in screening for either substance abuse or suicide risk or for multiple mental health risks, such as psychosocial functioning across a variety of contexts?
- Who do we want to assess—every child referred or a certain subgroup? Are we going to administer this instrument to every referred child or just those who meet certain criteria or are flagged by a screening tool?
- What will be the source of the information—information in the case file or a personal interview? If an interview, with whom? How accessible are the parties being interviewed, particularly if we are not interviewing the youth who is central to the case?
- Will it be easy to fold the interview protocol into the ongoing system processing? How hard will it be to actually integrate the instrument into ongoing policies and procedures?
- Who will administer the instrument? Will administration involve many staff within the system? Will it involve general intake staff, case supervision staff, or specialists? What kinds of special training will these staff need? Will administration be contracted outside to a special vendor?
- Has the instrument we are considering actually been used in a juvenile justice population? Has it been used on girls?
- How well does the instrument work for various racial and ethnic populations? Is the instrument culturally appropriate for the types of clients we serve?
- Has the instrument been normed or validated? If so, on what population? Was the sample representative?
- Has the instrument been shown to be reliable and valid? In other places that have used the instrument, has there been agreement on scoring between staff administering the instrument? Does the instrument provide consistent results when administered multiple times? How difficult is it to determine what the instrument is asking? Does it measure what it is supposed to measure?
- What are the costs of purchasing or using the instrument? Is it in the public domain, or must it be purchased? What are the startup or per-use costs? What are the costs associated with training existing staff or hiring trained staff?

in the online search tool and consider selecting those with favorable gender-based performance over instruments with unfavorable, mixed, or unknown gender-based performance.

**Strength-based instruments.** Juvenile justice practitioners and policymakers are showing increasing interest in “strength-based” instruments that emerged from the drug-prevention movement of the 1960s and were supported by the positive psychology movement in the 1990s. These instruments measure both negative and positive influences on a youth’s behavior by including protective factors to assess the level of risk for delinquent behavior. This approach represents a paradigm shift from a medical model focusing on problem assessment and remediation to a model stressing the development of assets. Strength-based instruments can create a well-balanced assessment by expanding, strengthening, and improving the juvenile justice system’s capacity to include the positive factors that affect a youth and the youth’s family, peers, and community—in addition to accounting for risk factors.

**Local validation.** A jurisdiction should not use an instrument developed in a different jurisdiction without subsequent validation in its own population. Practitioners must locally validate instruments because the statistics used to develop an instrument will fit the given distribution of a sample. Additionally, the specific scores assigned to individual items or questions and the total score will better reflect jurisdiction-specific policies and characteristics if the instrument has been validated in the local population.

Nonetheless, adopting extant instruments is a feasible and practical approach if—

- The instrument was developed through an adequate research

process that used appropriate validation techniques when tested in its original jurisdiction.

- The new jurisdiction begins to collect data so that the instrument can be validated with its own population.

**Cost.** Despite the obvious expenses associated with commercially available instruments, they should not be automatically dismissed, especially considering that many of the gender-appropriate instruments identified as favorable in this review have been published commercially. These instruments come with certain benefits, including that they—

- Typically have extensive research behind them.
- Frequently offer custom norming or the development of jurisdiction- and population-specific scores.
- Often allow for computerization of individual scoring.
- May provide for staff training.

Practitioners must weigh the benefits of using commercially available instruments against the sometimes considerable costs. Expenses can include the original purchase, administration costs for each individual assessed, and the cost of training staff or contracting with trained professionals to administer the instrument.

Using an instrument in the public domain (i.e., a “free” instrument) may also come with some costs. Costs may be associated with local validation should a jurisdiction choose to implement an instrument in the public domain for which gender performance is unknown. When deciding whether to invest in a commercial instrument or use a free instrument, practitioners will need to assess a wide variety of cost considerations and weigh these expenses

against the consequences of not considering gender performance at all.

## Conclusion

The information contained in this bulletin is meant to be a useful addition to the resources already available to practitioners, which include online and published instrument reviews. Examining gender issues across a wide variety of instruments has been an initial step in documenting what is known about gender and highlighting what remains unknown. Although the primary audience of this bulletin is juvenile justice practitioners, researchers and instrument developers interested in effective measurement may also find it useful. Researchers and instrument developers may want to ensure that gender-based information is clearly presented in their research publications, as well as in instrument manuals and Web sites. This will make it easier for practitioners to determine which instruments work best for girls.

## Endnotes

1. The impetus for this increased focus was the 1992 reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, which required states to provide details regarding their plans for addressing gender bias. This Act, which governs OJJDP's operations, was reauthorized most recently in 2002. The 2002 Act specifies that state plans addressing the use of Title II Formula and Block Grants should include “a plan for providing needed gender-specific services for the prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency” [42 U.S.C. 5633(a)(7)(B)(ii)].

2. In general, the distinction between “sex” and “gender” is that sex is biologically determined as either male or female, whereas gender refers to the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of being male or female. In this bulletin, we follow the convention of using “girls” when speaking of the specific group of concern, but also use “gender” to refer to the more general concept of male/female identity.
3. OJJDP asked the Girls Study Group to examine risk and needs assessment tools used for delinquency prevention, intervention, or treatment purposes and to determine their applicability for girls in light of the Group's findings. This review focuses on instrument performance as it relates to gender only. A full instrument review could cover a wide variety of topics to determine the potential usefulness of an instrument, including its purpose, whether it is a static or change measure, the constructs measured, the demographic and geographic representativeness of the sample used to develop the instrument, psychometrics (how reliable and valid the instrument is), and degree of specificity and sensitivity. A full review would also address more practical information such as reading level, available languages, number of items, time to administer, cost/availability, required training, original and revised publication dates, and version history. Although some of this information will be available on the companion Web site, a review of this depth was beyond the scope intended by OJJDP for GSG.
4. The treatment-focused instruments tend to be normed, whereas the risk assessment instruments tend to be validated.

5. The term “validation” is also used when describing treatment-focused instruments, but serves a different purpose in this case. In general, validation refers to the process of determining whether an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. For treatment-focused instruments, validation determines how well the instrument identifies the needs or conditions it was developed to identify or diagnose. For risk assessment instruments, validation determines how well the instrument predicts risk.
6. Assessing delinquent youth with instruments that were originally intended for general populations may not always be appropriate, and the consequences of doing so are unknown. However, there may be instances in which an instrument of a specific type is needed, but no instruments of that type have been developed for or tested in juvenile justice populations. In such instances, the benefits of using a standardized instrument developed for another population may outweigh the risks of using an instrument that was not specifically intended for use with juvenile delinquents. This is especially true if the standardized instrument is gender appropriate.
7. These tended to be instruments identified by practitioners and instruments mentioned only by acronym in article abstracts.
8. Although these combination instruments can screen for treatment needs, they primarily determine risk, which is what separates them from the “pure” needs assessment instruments described in the next section.

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Penalty for Private Use \$300



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POSTAGE & FEES PAID  
DOJ/OJJDP  
PERMIT NO. G-91