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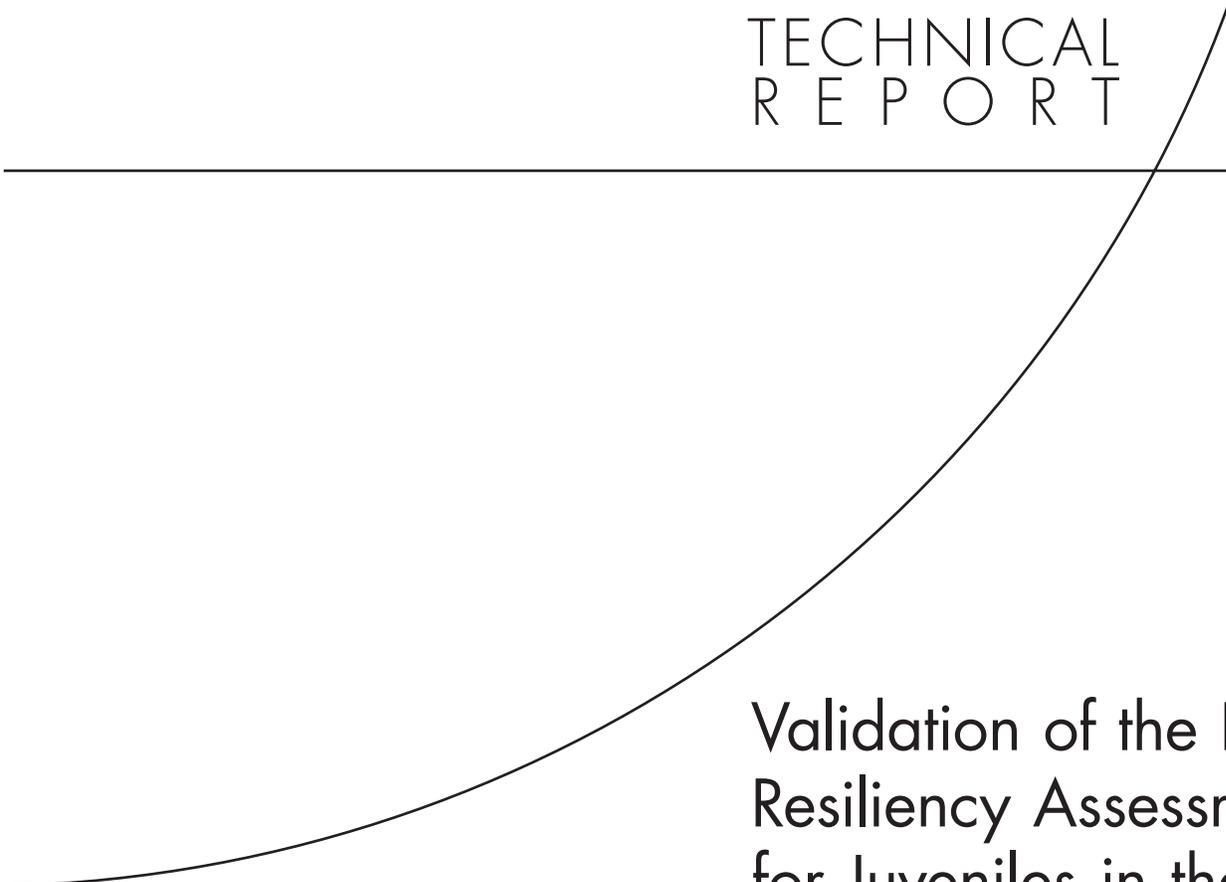
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TECHNICAL
R E P O R T



Validation of the Risk and
Resiliency Assessment Tool
for Juveniles in the
Los Angeles County
Probation System

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Prepared for the Los Angeles County Probation Department



INFRASTRUCTURE, SAFETY, AND ENVIRONMENT

The research described in this report was conducted within RAND Infrastructure, Safety, and Environment (ISE), a division of the RAND Corporation, for the Los Angeles County Probation Department.

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SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

On June 2, 2000, the Los Angeles County Probation Department entered into a settlement agreement with the Black Probation Officers Association in response to a civil suit. As part of the settlement, the Department was required to allocate resources internally based on the administration of a risk and needs instrument to its juvenile probationers. The parties agreed to stipulate the RAND Corporation as the evaluator of this instrument.

The parties requested that RAND do an exhaustive search of existing risk and needs instruments currently in use throughout the United States, determine their common elements, and recommend how to proceed. Options included using selected elements from one or more existing instruments to design a new risk and needs instrument specifically for Los Angeles, or adopting one or more instruments already in use elsewhere.

For the current study, RAND began by identifying and obtaining risk and needs instruments currently in use in the United States. We found that items used in risk and needs instruments generally fell into one of nine conceptual categories:

- Prior and current offenses/dispositions
- Family circumstances/parenting
- Education
- Employment
- Peer relations
- Substance abuse
- Leisure/recreation
- Personality/behavior
- Attitudes/orientation.

We identified three instruments that had undergone validation: the Youth Level of Service Inventory (YLSI), the San Diego Risk and Resiliency Checkup (SDRRC), and the Washington Association of Juvenile Court Administrators Risk Assessment (WSJCA-RA). The Department favored the SDRRC, created by Justice System Assessment & Training (JSAT) in 1998, primarily because it could be administered during the intake process. It also preferred the SDRRC's emphasis on positive ("protective") factors, whereas most risk and needs assessment instruments primarily measure risk factors. The

SDRRC consists of 60 items in six conceptual categories, half of which are risk factors and half protective factors.¹ Each conceptual category includes five protective factors and five risk factors. The remaining settlement parties agreed, and the SDRRC was selected as the instrument to be tested. RAND was asked to design a sampling framework to validate the SDRRC on Los Angeles juveniles handled by the Probation Department.

METHODS AND SAMPLE

A pilot test was designed to test the SDRRC in Los Angeles County. The final sample size target for the study was 1200 youths, stratified by gender, race/ethnicity, and court or non-court.² This sample size and stratification assured adequate power to detect overall and key subgroup differences in predictive ability of the SDRRC. Deputy Probation Officers (DPOs) were trained in the use and administration of the SDRRC by the instrument developers. Study assessments were gathered between December 2002 and October 2003. Information on services received was gathered from Probation files; data on recidivism were obtained from automated Probation information systems.

Information on the entire population of youths under Probation was also obtained, allowing us to weight the sample and analyses to reflect the entire county. Table S.1 presents the key sample characteristics.

¹ The conceptual categories are delinquency, education, family, peer relations, substance use, and individual factors.

² Police refer cases to the District Attorney in Los Angeles for processing. Youths charged with offenses for which the District Attorney must file and those youths who are detained in juvenile hall are directed to the Court for arraignment. The SDRRC was administered at this pre-plea stage for these “court” cases. Youths not initially referred to court—those generally with more minor offenses—are referred to Probation to make a determination of how to handle the case. These “non-court” cases can receive a number of possible outcomes, including having the case closed, the youth being placed on informal probation, or the case being referred to court. The SDRRC was administered to “non-court” cases at this point.

Table S.1
Demographic Characteristics (Weighted)

	<i>% of sample</i>	<i>% of probation population</i>
Gender		
Male	79.4%	79.4%
Female	20.6%	20.6%
Age		
9-12	6.0%	4.6%
13-14	23.1%	20.3%
15-16	39.8%	40.3%
17-18	30.5%	32.0%
19+	0.5%	2.8%
Ethnicity		
White	11.8%	11.7%
Black	27.9%	27.9%
Hispanic	54.6%	54.5%
Other	5.4%	5.5%
Unknown	0.3%	0.4%
Case Type		
Court	79.7%	79.6%
Non-court	20.3%	20.4%
Investigation	25.1%	21.4%
Supervision	74.9%	78.6%

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Characteristics of the SDRRC

The SDRRC comprises two subscales: protective factors and risk factors. Each of these contains subscales for delinquency, education, family, peer, substance use, and individual. Following the instructions by the authors of the SDRRC, resiliency is defined as the net sum of protective and risk factors (JSAT n.d., p. 9). Protective and risk factors are scored differently. The higher the protective score, the more protective factors the youth has. Risk scores have negative values; the more negative the value, the higher the risk. Thus we would expect positive correlations between the total resiliency score and (1) total risk score, (2) total protective score, and (3) the subcomponents of both risk and protective scales. In fact, that is what we found. At the same time, however, we found

fairly high correlations between individual subscale items, suggesting that they may be redundant.

Relationship Between Resiliency and Recidivism as Measured by Subsequent Arrest

For each of the youths assessed, we determined whether the youth was arrested within the 12 months following the administration of the assessment. The major question for the validation study is whether scores obtained on the SDRRC are related to subsequent recidivism. For this analysis, we divided the sample into approximate thirds and categorized the resulting groups as “low” (those with score 12 or less), “medium” (those with scores between 13 and 33), and “high” (those with score of 34 or higher). As Table S.2 shows, only 8% of “high resiliency” youths were arrested, compared with almost 36% of those with “low resiliency.”³

Table S.2
Arrested Within 12 Months of Assessment, by Resiliency Score (Weighted)

<i>Resiliency Score</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>% of sample</i>
Low (12 or less)	64.5%	35.5%	35.8%
Medium (13-33)	84.5%	15.5%	33.6%
High (34+)	91.8%	8.2%	30.6%
Total	79.6%	20.4%	100.0%

Chi-square = 88.3 (p < .0001)

In addition, we found that within each of the major racial groups, the resiliency score is significantly related to recidivism. Regardless of ethnicity, the higher the resiliency, the lower the likelihood of arrest for youths. The same holds true for males and females, and across all ages. Even controlling for other factors that might be related to recidivism, the SDRRC resiliency score is still significantly related to rearrest, as demonstrated by logistic regression analyses predicting any subsequent arrest during follow-up. Other factors also related to rearrest included being younger, being male (as opposed to being female), being white (as opposed to being Hispanic); and being under probation supervision during the 12-month follow-up period.

We also examined rearrest for a violent offense during the follow-up. Overall patterns are similar to those we observed for “any” arrest during follow-up, with a few notable exceptions. Whereas we saw sizable differences in the percent arrested for low-

³ For arrest rates by ungrouped resiliency scores, see Appendix A.

and medium-resiliency males and females, the percent for violent arrests are within a few percentage points of each other. Black low-resiliency youths appear to show much higher rearrest rates for “violent” offenses than do low-resiliency youths of other race/ethnicities.

Although the scale is valid overall and for different gender and ethnic subgroups, it does seem to work differently for some youths. For Hispanic youths, in particular, the scale is not as strong a predictor as for other youths. Some scale domains are not consistently predictive for major race/ethnic groups. For black youths, family risk factors are not predictive of rearrest; for Hispanic youths, substance abuse risk factors are not predictive. Analyses of services received, in which we expected more positive outcomes for those who received services, were not as expected. Higher-risk youths received more services, but when risk was controlled, referrals to services was not associated with reduced recidivism.

Limitations of Current Research

Research studies are subject to limitations and this one is no exception. Our follow-up was limited to 12 months following youth assessment with the SDRRC. Although this provides a window of time over which to observe behavior, longer follow-up time periods are preferable. Initially, a longer follow-up period had been planned, but the assessment phase took longer than expected.

As with many recidivism studies, our study relies on official records for measurement of youth behavior. We did not have access to youth’s self-reported criminal behavior, which can provide a more direct measure of criminal behavior (only a fraction of offenses result in arrest). Future research may want to examine the extent to which the SDRRC also corresponds with self-reported criminal behavior. To our advantage, however, the pilot test was conducted *before* the SDRRC was implemented. In this way, the validity testing was not contaminated by any system policies or practices that were based on classifications by the SDRRC.

The SDRRC does not have any predetermined cut-points for resiliency. Without cut-points for classification, we could not conduct any meaningful analyses of false positives and false negatives—or the extent to which errors in prediction are made when using the SDRRC. Cut-points will be determined during the implementation phase of the instrument in Los Angeles. We recommend that sensitivity analyses be part of continued monitoring of the instrument once it has been integrated into Probation Department practices (as described below).

In addition, more thorough examination needs to be conducted on differences in the scales and subscales for different subgroups of youths. This should also be part of continued monitoring of the instrument.

Systemwide Implementation of LARRC

The Los Angeles Probation Department has implemented a policy to institutionalize the SDRRC, now referred to as the LARRC. Training on LARRC began on August 4, 2004. To date, 908 out of 1388 DPOs have been trained in group sessions of 20 trainees each by the SDRRC developer. Trainees are given a pre- and post-test to ensure that they understand the concepts.

The Los Angeles Probation Department has started a policy that requires all DPOs in the Juvenile Bureaus to assess and reassess minors assigned to their caseloads at defined intervals as part of a plan to enhance case management services. As investigators are trained in the administration of the LARRC, the assessment will be utilized at the investigation level (the point at which the pilot assessment was done) and will continue through the supervision stages in order to address protective/risk/resiliency factors, update case planning efforts, and link minors to appropriate services and interventions.

In December 2004, staff began completing the LARRC assessment utilizing an automated system. Additionally, the Department is in the process of developing an automated case plan that will build on the LARRC assessment instrument as part of an enhanced case management process. The case management process will provide a more consistent and objective foundation for determining appropriate services based upon the needs of the minor.