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Construct, Predictive, and Incremental Validity of the Screening Scale for Pedophilic Interests (SSPI)

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SSPI

The Screening Scale for Pedophilic Interests (SSPI; Seto & Lalumière, 2001) offers an assessment of pedophilic interest based on the presence or absence of the following in their offense history:

- any male child victim
- more than one child victim
- any unrelated child victim
- any victims under 12

The scale was designed as a quick indicator of sexual interest or as a proxy measure where others (such as phallometry) were unavailable.

Gaps in current knowledge

There is evidence for the convergent validity of the SSPI, despite some equivocal findings. However, we wanted to examine this further by examining whether SSPI correlates with deviant sexual interest items/subscales from risk measures.

The predictive validity of the SSPI has not yet been firmly established. Only one study shows a relationship with sexual reoffending (Seto et al. 2004). Again, we planned to help address this gap by examining recidivism rates.

We also wanted to know whether the SSPI added incremental predictive ability to previously established risk scales.

Given that the SSPI is a proxy measure of sexual interest, we were interested in seeing if it could be used as a replacement for deviant sexual interest items in a risk assessment measure, the STABLE-2007.

Method

365 offenders from the Dynamic Supervision Project (Hanson et al. 2007)

All were adult male offenders starting community supervision and had at least one victim younger than 14.

Method (continued)

Measures

SSPI
Static-2002R
STABLE-2000
STABLE-2007

Recidivism

Sexual Recidivism: any sexually motivated offense (9%)
Sexual Recidivism with breaches: all sex offenses and violations of the conditions of community supervision (12%)
Follow-up ranged from 0.2 to 10.0 years ($M = 7.5$, $SD = 2.0$, $Mdn = 8.0$).

Results

SSPI correlates moderately ($r = .27$) with the deviant sexual interest item from the STABLE-2000; and correlates strongly with the deviant sexual interest item from the STABLE-2007 ($r = .55$) and the deviant sexual interests subscale of the Static-2002R ($r = .70$). Additional analyses also suggested that the SSPI is more strongly related to items measuring deviant sexual interests than general criminality/antisociality.

The SSPI was significantly related to both sexual recidivism ($AUC = .62$) and sexual recidivism with breaches ($AUC = .64$). This predictive accuracy was comparable with the deviant sexual interest items/subscales from the Static-2002R, STABLE-2000, and STABLE-2007.

The accuracy of the prediction of sexual recidivism including breaches could be improved by considering SSPI in addition to the STABLE-2007 but SSPI scores did not add incremental predictive accuracy to the Static-2002R.

Using SSPI scores (rescaled onto a 0-2 scale) as a substitute for the deviant sexual interest item on the STABLE-2007 maintained the predictive accuracy of the risk measure.

What do our findings mean for research and practice?

Our results build on previous literature demonstrating the convergent, divergent, and predictive validity of the SSPI.

We conclude that the SSPI is useful as a brief measure of sexual interest in children.

It performs equally as well as indicators of deviant sexual interests from multiple risk scales.

The SSPI did not add incrementally to the predictive ability of the Static-2002R risk scale, suggesting that the static scale is adequately incorporating deviant sexual interest in children. However the STABLE-2007 may benefit by giving greater weight to deviant sexual interests.

Where it is not possible to calculate the deviant sexual interest item of the STABLE-2007, the SSPI may be used to calculate a substitute value, though we recommend this for research rather than for practice.

Reference

For the full paper:

Helmus, L., Ó Ciardha, C., & Seto, M. C. (2014). The Screening Scale for Pedophilic Interests (SSPI): Construct, Predictive, and Incremental Validity. *Law and Human Behavior*. doi: 10.1037/lhb0000099

Thanks

We would like to thank R. Karl Hanson for permission to use these data

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