



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES
Division of Public Behavioral Health & Justice Policy

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Mariko Lockhart, Director
Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative
700 5th Avenue, Suite 1700
P.O. Box 94649
Seattle, WA 98124-4649

Re: Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative Risk Assessment Tool Validation Study

Dear Ms. Lockhart:

We are writing this letter, as requested, to provide an update on the development of the SYVPI Risk Assessment tool and description of the validation study which will examine the function of the tool within the initiative to accurately identify youth in need of services.

The risk assessment tool now used by SYVPI was developed in partnership with UW researchers to help identify risk and some protective factors related to youth violence. In the development of the tool, we were mindful of published, well-established research findings on the etiology of youth violence and sought to incorporate questions that capture a range of previously studied risk indicators. These include individual characteristics and predispositions to antisocial behavior (e.g., behaviors, attitudes), as well as aspects of youths' home, school, and social environments. The tool attends to youths' histories of crime and substance use, their affiliations with gangs, exposure to violence, and mental health. Questions related to youths' academic achievement, truancy, and record of suspensions and expulsions are also included to help surface problems within the school setting that are themselves predictive of violence and delinquency. While questions on the form are intentionally geared to assessing underlying risks, it was also our intent to collect information on protective influences from social support, which research shows are critical to successfully engaging youth and to administering services appropriately tailored to the needs of the individuals involved.

The tool is informed by current research, but developed to reflect the views and preferences of the providers within the local SYVPI network. The tool was vetted by local providers at various stages of the development process, offering in the end an instrument that reflects the

collective wisdom and expertise of all involved. The tool holds considerable promise for bolstering the assessment processes of SYVPI and for increasing capacity within the initiative for formative and summative evaluations. All parties involved in the development of the tool believe it is now ready for quantitative examination through a validation study process.

The City of Seattle is interested in evaluating the effectiveness of this tool in identifying youth needs and propensity for violence as well as for use as a process evaluation tool to monitor progress of youth and the SYVPI. The validation study will proceed in two phases: First, we will examine the content of the tool including how items and scales are related to each other, whether items are effective in distinguishing needs, and whether items are measuring the intended domains. This will be accomplished by both within-instrument analyses through frequency analyses and approaches that will test the degree to which items are similar or dissimilar from other items. Additionally, the validation will include comparing school performance and discipline data to the instrument item and scale scores to determine whether the instrument accords with other official records of risk/need. We anticipate this first phase to be completed by August 2013. The second phase involves a predictive validity analysis, in which we will examine the effectiveness of the tool in correctly distinguishing youth at risk for violence based on police arrests and court adjudications. These analyses will include examination of the types of services received through the SYVPI in order to account for potential treatment effects. The second phase will be completed by December 2014. Both phases will include reports that summarize activities and provide recommendations for instrument improvements, as needed, and uses in the field.

The tool is currently being used in the three SYVPI neighborhood networks and by case management staff and street outreach workers. The development team agreed when we developed the tool that the initial assessment should be conducted by these three SYVPI investment areas to ensure maximum implementation of the tool. Based on the referral information received by the networks for new youth, a determination is made to refer directly to case management or street outreach. SYVPI Risk Assessment Protocols require that the assessment be conducted upon intake of new youth into the Initiative by these three investment areas, at six month intervals, upon exit from case management and street outreach, and upon closure from the Initiative (see attached). In its current form, information gleaned from the completed risk assessments is used to gauge the level and types of presenting risk and protective factors and to aid in the determination of service referrals for the youth. Additionally, once more periodic assessments are available over time, SYVPI staff will use them to determine change in risk factors and impact of the interventions. Once the predictive validity analysis is completed and the tool is adapted, weighted scores will be incorporated into the tool which will allow for further refinement of its use for referral and assessment.

We believe the risk assessment tool is in a sufficient stage of development to be tested in the field and subjected to a validation analysis. The results will inevitably lead to improvements in the tool for usability, identification, referral and progress monitoring.

Regards,

Todd Herrenkohl, PhD
School of Social Work, University of Washington

Suzanne Kerns, PhD
Division of Public Behavioral Health & Justice Policy, Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral
Sciences, University of Washington

Sarah Cusworth Walker, PhD
Division of Public Behavioral Health & Justice Policy, Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral
Sciences, University of Washington