

Screening and Measures Tool

Measures, assessments, and screenings are typically considered a tool for evaluation. They are often used to demonstrate change. However, they can also be used as a way to predict future behaviors. The Juvenile Justice system uses several measures in this way, including the Colorado Juvenile Risk Assessment (CJRA) and the Juvenile Delinquent Screening and Assessment Guide (JDSAG). Whether using tools for measuring outcomes or to guide treatment decisions, the measures should also be evidence based and well researched.

How are these measures “evidence based?”

Certain screening tools or measures have gone through a process of validation. This process allows for specific questions to be answered including:

- ❖ How well scales measure abstract concepts and underlying constructs
- ❖ How well items interact with each other to assess this construct
- ❖ Whether the scale can measure change over time
- ❖ If the scale accurately measures the construct in different populations

Typically, evidence-based scales have gone through research with very large sample sizes, multiple administrations and are compared to other concrete examples of the same concept. These large samples are then analyzed through statistical methods to determine how well each question performs, and how well the scale as a whole represents the underlying construct.

Why should we use evidence-based measures?

They provide a quick way to understand and measure concepts that are often difficult to quantify. Because they are evidence based and have been studied over time, they have demonstrated to measure constructs in a way that is more universal and can be used to demonstrate a need or demonstrate change.

What to look for when choosing a measure:

Reliability - how accurate is the measure? Think of a ruler - it is reliable in that it always measures the same amount each time. Does it measure the concept in the same way over time? Do the items seem to fit together well to create a concept better than a single question might?

- There are specific statistics that measure whether or not a measure is reliable. You will see this listed as Cronbach’s alpha or often just “alpha.” To be considered reliable, the alpha should be above .70.

Validity - does it measure what it claims to measure? For example, depression is not just feeling sad, but also problems with energy, sleep and motivation. For example, a school engagement measure may be compared to youths’ attendance and grades as indicators of how they are participating in school.

Some things to consider when choosing a measure:

Can I get access to it?

- Is it free and available in the public domain or do I have to pay for it?
- If I have to pay for it, how much does it cost?

- Does the license to use it include just permission, or does It also include some type of reporting or analysis?

What is the experience of the users?

- How much time does it take to complete?
- How easy is it to understand and navigate?
- Is the literacy level appropriate so that you your participants can read and understand it?

Who were the participants in the validation studies?

- Does it match the population with which I am working?
- If not, can it be adapted?

