

First results of a French validation of the SVR-20 among sexual offenders convicted in Switzerland



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Theoretical background

The *Sexual Violence Risk assessment guideline* (SVR-20) is a Structured Professional Judgement based tool composed of 20 items, each corresponding to a risk factor for sexual offending recidivism. Once each factor is rated, then the practitioner has to estimate by himself the risk of reoffending.

Study purpose

This study purpose is to assess the validity of the French version of the SVR-20 guideline. These first results cover reliability and concurrent validity with general and specific risk assessment instruments.

Methods

Subjects

This study is based on the criminal cases and psychiatric records of 40 offenders convicted of sexual offenses and appraised between 2000 and 2005.

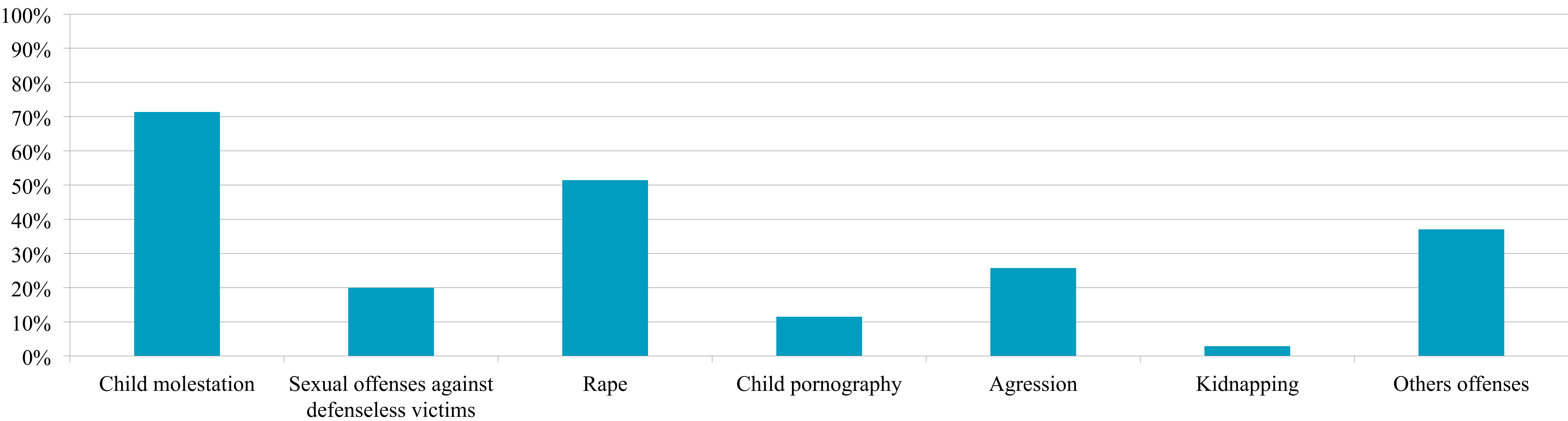
Procedure

5 different researchers used multiple instruments to assess risk of recidivism: SVR-20, Hare’s Psychopathy Checklist (PCL-R), Historical Clinical Risk assessment guideline (HCR-20), Violence Risk Appraisal Guide (VRAG) and Static-99 revised version. SVR-20 and Static-99 are both specific instruments measuring risk of sexual recidivism. HCR-20 and VRAG measure risk of violent reoffending, while PCL-R measures psychopathic and antisocial attitudes.

Sample’s characteristics

Three categories of offenses were considered in order to include subjects in this study: child molestation, rape and sexual offenses against defenseless victims (e.g. mentally deficient victims or people who have been drugged before they were abused). From the 40 offenders appraised, 26 were child molesters, 19 were convicted of rape and 7 were convicted of sexual offenses against defenseless victims. Additionnal charges are reported in figure 1.

Figure 1 – Types of offenses committed by the subjects



Results

Regarding the reliability of the instrument, split-half reliability was .75 using Spearman’s correction formula, which indicates a satisfactory reliability. On the other hand, Cronbach’s α coefficient was .45 due to the fact that some items did not vary among the sample. Still this suggests a lack of internal consistency.

Interrater reliability was .73, which shows that the researchers rated the offenders in the same way.

Concerning concurrent validity, strong associations could be found between SVR-20, PCL-R and HCR-20 scores. Nonetheless, there was no correlation between SVR-20 and VRAG scores, sustaining that the two instruments focus on both specific and independent risk factors. Surprisingly, ‘sexual offenses’ factor was not correlated with Static-99 but was associated with the PCL-R (table 1).

Table 1 – Concurrent validity

Subscales	Risk assessment scales			
	PCL-R	HCR-20	VRAG	Static-99-R
Psychosocial adjustment	.75**	.78**	n.s.	.47**
Sexual offenses	.53**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Future plans	.46**	.41**	n.s.	n.s.
Overall score	.76**	.59**	n.s.	.35*

* p<.05; ** p<.01

Conclusion

These first results are consistent with international literature. However, most of the former studies are neither representative of Swiss people nor of their legal system. Thus further investigations are now required to assess the predictive validity of this instrument.

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