



# Strengths/Structured Assessment for Youth (S/SAY): A new tool to assess the strengths of justice-involved youths

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A question? Scan here!



## Introduction

- Structured assessment with standardized evaluation tool increases the predictive validity of recidivism risk evaluation (Ægisdóttir & al., 2006; Guay & al., 2015) : YLS/CMI = the main tool for youth that is used all over the world
- Thinking of the assessment as the first contact with the justice-involved youth, with a focus on their deficits, contributes to some extent to reducing the youth to their only difficulties and could limit the deployment of the intervention objectives (Case & Haines, 2016; McNeill, 2006).
  - Priority to stop criminal conducts and fulfilment comes second (Fortune & Ward, 2017; Ward & al., 2012)
  - What about non-criminogenic needs and effect on treatment motivation? (Haqanee & al., 2015; Serie, 2021; Fortune & Ward, 2017; Ward & al., 2012)



### The evaluation of strengths with the S/SAY

S/SAY is a structured assessment tool for the evaluation of strengths for justice-involved youth, including between 24 and 26 concrete strength items, such as being able to maintain a reciprocal friendly relationship with another teenager.

→ A strength precedes the development of a protective factor because it doesn't have a protective effect yet.

#### Objectives:

- To assess S/SAY psychometric properties

## Methodology

**Participants:** 267 justice-involved youths (exclusively men) from juvenile justice facilities in Belgium

- **Age:**  $M=16.5$  years at the time of assessment ( $SD=1.1$  years; range=13-19 years)
- **Nationality:** Belgian (86%) and others (14%)
- **Belgian area provenance:** Hainaut (25%), Namur (6%), Luxembourg (3%), Liège (11%), Bruxelles francophone (47%) and Brabant-Wallon (8%)
- **Juvenile Justice facilities provenance:** open system (30%) and close system (70%)
- **Already known by Juvenile Justice for delinquency:** "no" (66%) and "yes" (34%)

#### Analytical strategy:

- **Fidelity:** Internal consistency with the Cronbach alpha
- **Predictive validity:** AUC (Note: *Recidivism* = any new charges with one-year follow-up period)
- **Divergent validity:** Pearson's correlations ( $r$ )

## Results

### Portrait of risk factors and strengths

**Table 1.** Risk factors, strengths, risk levels per domain and final risk level average (n=267)

Domain name	Mean number of risk factors (RF) in the YLS/CMI		Mean number of strengths (S) in the S/SAY	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Prior and Current Offenses/Dispositions 5 RF / 0 S	1.66 (33%)	1.84	-	-
Family Circumstances/Parenting 6 RF / 3 S	3.22 (54%)	1.88	1.07 (36%)	1.07
Education/Employment 7 RF / 4 S	3.05 (44%)	2.01	0.83 (21%)	1.32
Peer Relations 4 RF / 3 S	2.43 (61%)	1.24	1.98 (66%)	1.08
Substance Abuse 5 RF / 4 S	1.35 (27%)	1.48	0.64 (16%)	0.70
Leisure/Recreation 3 RF / 4 S	2.11 (70%)	.87	1.00 (25%)	1.29
Personality/Behavior 7 RF / 6 S	2.25 (32%)	1.92	2.09 (35%)	1.95
Attitudes/Orientation 5 RF / 3 S	1.99 (40%)	1.38	0.98 (33%)	1.01

Note: S/SAY domains are based on the YLS/CMI domains. The average of final risk is 18.06 ( $SD=8.09$ ; range=3-38).

### Internal consistency

**Table 2.** Cronbach alphas for the YLS/CMI and the S/SAY

Domain name	YLS/CMI	S/SAY
Prior and Current Offenses/Dispositions	.85	-
Family Circumstances/Parenting	.75	.66
Education/Employment	.73	.83
Peer Relations	.65	.67
Substance Abuse	.76	.67 <sup>1</sup> (.77) <sup>2</sup>
Leisure/Recreation	.58	.79
Personality/Behavior	.72	.79
Attitudes/Orientation	.58	.59
Total score	.85	-

Note: <sup>1</sup>This value obtained only with non-drug abusers (n=159). <sup>2</sup>This value obtained with the total sample (n=267) without the item "No consumption".

### Predictive validity

**Table 3.** AUC for the YLS/CMI and the S/SAY

Domain name	YLS/CMI	S/SAY
Prior and Current Offenses/Dispositions	.62 [.51-.73]	-
Family Circumstances/Parenting	.61 [.50-.72]	.54 [.43-.66]
Education/Employment	.64 [.53-.75]	.55 [.43-.67]
Peer Relations	.57 [.47-.68]	.55 [.44-.66]
Substance Abuse	.55 [.45-.66]	-
Leisure/Recreation	.55 [.43-.66]	.60 [.49-.71]
Personality/Behavior	.57 [.46-.68]	.61 [.49-.72]
Attitudes/Orientation	.57 [.45-.68]	.52 [.40-.64]
Total score	.65 [.54-.76]	.59 <sup>1</sup> [.46-.71]

Note: <sup>1</sup>This value obtained without the Substance Abuse Domain (n=115).

### Divergent validity with the YLS/CMI

$r = -.52$

Note: Correlation based on the total score of the YLS/CMI and the S/SAY

## Discussion

**Average of risk factors and strengths:** The highest proportion of risk factors is founded in the Family Circumstances/Parenting, Peer Relations and Leisure/Recreation domains. At the same time, the Peer Relations domain is also the one with the highest number of strengths. This finding tends to confirm that the same life domain can be both a resource to personal fulfillment and a barrier to justice-involved youths' non-reoffending.

**Internal consistency:** S/SAY internal consistency ranges from good to excellent ( $\alpha=.66$  to  $.83$ ), except for the Attitude/Orientation domain that is acceptable ( $\alpha=.59$ ).

// Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY; Borum & al., 2002): a good to excellent internal consistency (Koh & al., 2020).

// Structured Assessment of PROtective Factors for violence risk-Youth Version (SAPROF-YV; de Vries Robbé & al., 2015): excellent internal consistency (Bhanwer, 2016; Finseth & al., 2023).

**Predictive validity:** None of S/SAY domains are significant, but two of them (Leisure/Recreation and Personality/Behavior) and the final score are almost statistically significant with small effect sizes (AUC=.59 to .61).

// SAVRY: small for the protective domain (AUC=.56 to .64) (Kleeven & al., 2022; Koh & al., 2022; Lovatt & al., 2022).

// SAPROF-YV: moderate to high (AUC=.67 to .80) for general recidivism and moderate (AUC=.62 to .70) for violent recidivism (Chu & al., 2020; de Ruigh & al., 2021).

**Divergent validity:** S/SAY presents a large effect size ( $r = -.52$ ) with YLS/CMI.

// YLS/CMI with SAPROF-YV: Correlations between the SAPROF-YV and the YLS/CMI were between  $r = -.53$  to  $r = -.68$  (Finseth et al. 2023).

## Conclusion

S/SAY is designed to take a holistic view of the positive aspects of justice-involved youths. It is a promising tool in terms of its psychometric qualities. Particularly, for the predictive validity, the results obtained are encouraging in anticipation of analyses to be carried out on a larger sample, including girls.

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