Promoting Positive Youth Development in Juvenile Justice Settings: What Do We Need to Know?

Gina M. Vincent, PhD, Associate Professor
UMass CHAN Medical School
What is Positive Youth Development?

An intentional, prosocial approach that:

- engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive;
- recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people’s strengths; and
- promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths.”

-IWGYP, youth.gov
Positive Youth Development in Juvenile Justice

Positive Youth Justice

“...applies lessons from the science of adolescent development to routine practices of youth-service organizations.”

Two Core Assets:

1. Learning/Doing
   Developing new skills, roles/responsibilities

2. Attaching/Belonging
   Becoming active member of social groups; increase engagement

How To Operationalize?
The Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Approach (Andrews & Bonta)

**Risk Principle**
Match the intensity of the intervention with one’s level of risk for re-offending

**Need Principle**
Target dynamic or changeable risk factors and only those factors *(criminogenic needs)*

**Responsivity Principle**
Match the mode & strategies of services with the individual

> 370 Studies (Andrews & Bonta, 2010)
Optimizing Supervision and Service Strategies to Reduce Reoffending (*NIJ Protective Factors Project*)

**Investigators:** Gina Vincent, PhD, UMASS Chan Medical; Jennifer Skeem, PhD, UC Berkley; & Josh Weber, MPA, Council of State Governments Justice center  
**Project Director:** Rachael Perrault, MA  
**Research Coordinators:** Lindsey Stevens, MA; Karlie Rice, MA; Lauren MacDowell, MA
How to Operationalize PYJ and Maximize Case Planning?

1. Relevance of Protective Factors/Strengths
   - Which protective factors/strengths add value to case planning? (In other words, which ones are mostly closely linked to reductions in reoffending?)

2. Utility for Case Planning and Services
   - Which Strengths-based services have the greatest value for recidivism reduction?

3. Developmental issues
   - How do both of the above differ for youth at different developmental stages?
4. Risk-Need-Responsivity – competing or complementary?
   ◦ What is the value added to what POs already know about risk factors and risk reduction services?
   ◦ In other words, how do RNR and PYJ fit together in case planning?

Some speculation about additive value of strengths in case planning (de Vries Robbe & Willis, 2017)
   ◦ May ‘...alter the way in which frontline workers view and engage those in the criminal justice system’ (p 60).
   ◦ “....focusing on strengths in addition to risks also holds promise for improving the therapeutic alliance” (p.60)
Protective Factors Project

3 states; 5 Probation Probation Offices per State (15)

PA Juvenile Court Judges Commission
YLS/CMI

WI Dept of Children & Families
YASI

VA Dept of Juvenile Justice
YASI
NIJ Protective Factors Project Procedures

1. Implemented **Protective factor** survey – 15 probation offices (5 per state) to supplement the risk-needs assessments of strengths as part of their routine intake or assessment procedures

2. Expanded **service data tracking** in electronic case management systems
   - All services/activities/programs in which youth engage, regardless of payer or referrer
   - Especially strengths—based services & activities

3. Two samples of youth to examine value of a) risk factors vs protective factors in ‘prediction’ of recidivism, and b) risk reduction vs. strengths-based services in ‘reduction’ of recidivism
   - Archival (2017-2019) sample & New sample (July 2021 onward)
   - Examine recidivism **during AND after supervision**
Definition & Relevance of Protective Factors/Strengths
What Are Protective Factors/Strengths?

Promotive Factor (Farrington, Ttofi, & Piquero, 2016)
- Variable that predicts a low probability of offending
  - If linearly related to delinquency (‘opposites’) = both a risk factor and a promotive factor (e.g., high school achievement)
  - If not linear & % delinquency is high among the ‘worst’ scorers but not low among the ‘worst’ scorers = risk factor only (e.g., peer delinquency, impulsivity)
  - If not linear & % delinquency is low among the ‘best’ scorers but not high among the ‘worst’ scorers = promotive only (e.g., neuroticism, intelligence)
What Are Protective Factors/Strengths?

**Protective Factor** (Farrington, Ttofi, & Piquero, 2016)
- Interactive Protective Factor = Variable acts as a ‘buffer’ to nullify the effects of a risk factor
- Risk-Based Protective Factor = Variable associated w/low probability of offending among a high-risk group

**Strengths**
- Positive attributes that are empirically related to a reduced probability of delinquency or recidivism (e.g., Goodwin et al., 2022); factors negatively related to recidivism
- Often used as a ‘catch-all’

**Practical Application?**
Risk-Needs Assessment w/Protective Factor Scale

Protective Factor Scale (6-items)
- Prosocial involvement
- Strong social support
- Strong attachment and bonds
- Positive attitude toward intervention/authority
- Strong commitment to school
- Resilient personality

Standalone PF Measures
- Structured Assessment of Protective Factors for Violence Risk-Youth Version (SAPROF-YV; de Vries Robbe)
- Protective factors for reducing juvenile reoffending (PFRJR; Barnes-Lee, 2020)
- Strengths Assessment Inventory – Youth Version (Rawana & Brownlee, 2010)
Most need (risk) domains have a converse strength score:

- Aggression/Violence
- Community/Peers
- Alcohol and Drugs
- Attitudes
- Skills
- Family
- School
- Employment and Free Time

Brown et al. (2020) - Many strength scores had incremental predictive value over risk/needs but did not interact with needs (not a buffer) among youth.
Youths’ strengths (as measured by the SAPROF-YV) mediated (but did not moderate) service-to-need match in the prediction of recidivism after accounting for youths’ level of risk.

**In other words:**
- The more strengths youths had – the more likely they were to have dynamic risk areas/needs addressed (match)
- The match was associated with lower recidivism

**Concluded:** Strengths – Responsivity Factor
Four Supplementary Protective Factors Included in Protective Factors Project

Prosocial identity

Generally prosocial goals, values, and beliefs. Adolescence is a significant period for developing one’s identity. Good Samaritan or ‘tough guy/girl’?

Prosocial Engagements

Increasing engagement in educational, employment, and community pursuits can be protective and is a primary goal of PYD. Includes measures of social responsibility

Social Skills and Supports

Interpersonal skills and social relationships may protect against reoffending by increasing the likelihood of bonding with a more prosocial peer group.

Self-control & Self-efficacy

- Ability to control one’s emotional and behavioral impulses. Having a belief in one’s own ability to handle life difficulties
Research Question 1: What Matters Most For Lowering the Likelihood of Reoffending Among Youth and Does it Differ by Developmental Period? Young/Older

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reducing Risk Factors?</th>
<th>Enhancing Strengths?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Personality/Behavior (e.g., Aggression and Emotion Regulation)</td>
<td>1. Prosocial identity</td>
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<td>2. Pro-crime attitudes/problems with authority</td>
<td>2. Prosocial Engagements – School/Work</td>
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<td>5. Family/lack of parental monitoring &amp; discipline</td>
<td>5. Family Support</td>
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<td>7. Self-efficacy</td>
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<td>8. Employment/job skills and/or Education</td>
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Strengths-Based vs. Risk Reduction Services
What Are Risk-Reduction Services?

Services designed to address or ‘treat’ dynamic risk factors (needs); focus on reducing risk factors to prevent recidivism. Examples:

- Anything cognitive behavioral therapy-based (e.g., Thinking for a change)
- Family services to improve conflict and parenting practices (e.g., MST, FFT, PMT)
- Substance use treatment
- Aggression-related (e.g., anger management, aggression replacement training)
- Gang-related interventions
What Are Strengths-Based Services?

Services promoting competence and skill building, prosocial engagements, and/or prosocial attachment. Examples:

- Big Brothers/Big Sisters
- Prosocial Skills and Life-Skills Training
- Vocational training
- School-based interventions- extracurricular activities
- Voluntary Volunteer work
  - Restorative programs w/ victim mediation component
Crossroads Study (N = 1,216 JJ youth)

Examined participation in school-based extracurricular activities and delinquency (self-reported measure) for over 3 years

Finding: Justice-involved males who engaged in more delinquency were less likely to participate in extracurricular activities rather than the other way around.

Young men who participated in these activities did not differ in subsequent delinquent activities.
Research Question 2: What Matters Most For Lowering the Likelihood of Reoffending Among Youth and Does it Differ by Developmental Period?

**Strengths-based**
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## Anticipated Benefits of Study

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<th>Benefit #1</th>
<th>Develop procedures for improving the recording of service delivery in JJ nationally</th>
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<td>Benefit #2</td>
<td>Identify methods for use of both risk and protective factors to inform and strengthen case planning, supervision, and selection of services to reduce recidivism</td>
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<td>Benefit #3</td>
<td>Conserve resources by optimizing these supervision strategies by age group</td>
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