



RESEARCH MATTERS

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THE CRACOW: A MULTI-STAGE RISK/NEEDS INSTRUMENT FOR YOUTH

Issue: Can the CRACOW accurately and reliably assess the risk and needs of multi-problem youth during the early years of development?

Context: Until recently, the focus for the understanding and prevention of youth violence has been on the period of adolescence. As such, there exists limited knowledge of the risk factors that may be specific during early years. As a consequence, there are few reliable and valid assessment tools for youth who exhibit problems in various areas that can be used during early childhood.

The CRACOW instrument was designed to measure the risk/needs factors in youth at various developmental stages. This assessment tool takes into consideration the exposure to and accumulation of a number of dynamic factors that may influence the risk of youth violence. It also takes into account that some of these factors operate earlier than others in the child's development.

The current study tests whether the risk/needs factors in early childhood included in the CRACOW help to identify the most physically aggressive preschoolers.

Method: The data were drawn from the Vancouver Longitudinal Study on the Psychosocial Development of Children. The sample used the first 100 children (boys and girls) recruited in the study. One in-person interview involving a series of tasks and tests informing about the child's

cognitive and self-regulation abilities was conducted simultaneously with each child and his/her primary caregiver. The information collected was used to complete the CRACOW instrument for each child. Several other indicators and socio-demographic characteristics of the family environment were also measured to explore potential individual differences in the level of aggression. The frequency of physical aggression in the past year was measured using four items (i.e., kicking, shoving, fighting, and throwing things at others).

Results: Preliminary analyses suggested the presence of three groups of physically aggressive children: low-, medium- and high-level groups. These groups represented 36%, 34% and 30% of the sample, respectively, and showed few significant differences on descriptive factors (e.g., gender, family income) and socio-demographic characteristics.

Additional analyses indicated that the CRACOW instrument could help identify the three groups of physically aggressive children for the period of early childhood. Taken separately, single risk/needs factors (e.g., maternal substance use, hostile parenting style, attention deficits) had only a small effect on high levels of physical aggression.

However, several important differences emerged when exploring broader domains of risk/needs factors.

The findings showed that the highly aggressive children were more likely than the medium– and/or low– level groups to have risk/needs factors in the pre/perinatal, socioeconomic, family environment, child psychological functioning, and parenting domains. Not surprisingly, the highly aggressive group of children also scored higher on the overall scale than the other two groups. Overall, these results suggest that the CRACOW helps to identify highly aggressive children by differentiating them from other children.

Implications:

1. Developing and testing a multi-stage risk-assessment instrument is important to assist practitioners in designing and implementing appropriate individual, familial, and community interventions aimed at reducing the risk of youth violence.
2. The CRACOW is capable of capturing significant individual and environmental risk/needs factors of aggression in pre-schoolers, thus showing promise for the assessment of multi-problem violent youth.
3. The identification, early in childhood, of risk/needs factors that have been shown to be related to serious and violent delinquency during adolescence suggests that the risk/needs factors are operating earlier than criminologists and other social scientists have traditionally believed.
4. Highly aggressive children are those exposed to many different risk/needs factors often acting in combination, reinforcing the need for a comprehensive, wide-ranging preventive strategy starting at the earliest developmental stages and continuing throughout childhood and adolescence.

Source: Lussier, P., R. Corrado, et al. 2010. *[The CRACOW Instrument: A New Framework for the Assessment of Multi-problem Violent Youth](#)*. Research Report. Ottawa: Public Safety Canada.

Also available on Public Safety Canada's web site at: <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/res/cp/res/crawcow-cracovie-eng.aspx>

Visit the Public Safety website and add your name to the NCPC Mailing List: www.PublicSafety.gc.ca/NCPC

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