EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Correctional agencies must balance demands for public safety and the desire to rehabilitate offenders within resource limits. Recognizing that most offenders will return to the community, it is incumbent on corrections personnel to maximize the chances that correctional interventions will improve offender adjustment. To do this, correctional agencies devote considerable resources to the development and use of information to guide custody and treatment decision. Called "case classification," agencies seek to assess offender risk and needs.

The technology of correctional case classification has been evolving over the past seventy-five years. Most operating juvenile corrections agencies do not have the expertise and resources required to develop their own standardized classification tool. Rather, they often decide to use an existing instrument. One such instrument gaining popularity in recent years is the Youthful Level of Service Inventory (Y-LSI). This instrument involves a face-to-face interview with the juvenile offender and a review of case records to gather information relevant to forty-two questions across eight domains (Hoge and Andrews, 1996). These domains are; prior and current offenses/adjudications, family circumstances/parenting, education/employment, peer relations, substance abuse, leisure/recreation, personality/behavior and, attitudes and orientations.

The Y-LSI is described as a classification instrument that not only accurately predicts risk of failure (risk classification), but also identifies specific areas of treatment needs that, if addressed, will result in reduced risk. The instrument is said to be valid with a variety of populations and across a range of correctional settings. The research reported here was designed to test the applicability of the Y-LSI with juvenile offenders in residential, institutional, and community supervision (probation) settings in Ohio.

Y-LSI assessments were completed for samples of youth in three Ohio juvenile corrections settings. Follow-up data on case outcomes were collected two years later. In addition, correctional staff in the three settings were surveyed for their perceptions concerning the value and use of the Y-LSI. Analyses tested the predictive validity of the Y-LSI.

The results indicate that the Y-LSI is generally a valid predictor of case outcome across the three correctional settings. Further, the overall Y-LSI score is significantly related with case outcomes for both males and females, and for white and non-white juveniles. Some differences in predictive accuracy across correctional settings were observed. Optimal risk classification requires norming scores for each specific offender population. Within the Y-LSI, multivariate analyses indicate that relatively few of the forty-two items contribute to accuracy in risk classification. Further, of the eight domains, only prior and current offenses, substance abuse, and attitudes/orientations are significantly related to case outcomes.

Few correctional agencies conduct routine reassessments of youth. Based on limited data coming from reassessments of selected cases, analyses indicate that reassessment scores will reflect participation in, and completion of correctional treatment. Additionally, reassessment scores are significantly related to case outcomes. It appears

that the Y-LSI can identify treatment needs, and that meeting those needs will translate into both lower assessment scores and reduced risk of correctional failure.

Despite plans to make more use of the Y-LSI, most respondents to our survey report that the Y-LSI is used only for initial risk classification. Completion of the Y-LSI assessment was reported to take 65 minutes, on average. Given that these agencies did not use the assessment to identify treatment needs and did not use reassessments to gauge case progress, use of the Y-LSI was not viewed as necessary by most responding correctional staff.

Our data indicate that if the correctional agency wishes only to achieve an initial risk classification, the Y-LSI may not be an appropriate instrument. Few components of the total score contribute to overall risk prediction accuracy, and the requirements for completing the assessment (over one hour of staff time) militate against recommending use of the Y-LSI for simple risk classification. If, on the other hand, the agency wishes to assess needs and use need assessment information to develop and deliver effective interventions, our data suggest the Y-LSI is a useful tool. Accuracy of the Y-LSI for any given correctional population will be improved if assessment scores are first normed for the specific population on which the instrument will be used.

The Y-LSI is a valid predictor of correctional outcome for a variety of delinquent youth and over a range of correctional settings. Optimal value from the use of this instrument can be achieved by full implementation, including validating the instrument on the population of interest. As with most decisions, correctional administrators should carefully consider how they plan to use the Y-LSI before adopting the instrument. Our research indicates that the instrument is well-suited to case management. If the purpose of classification is limited to risk classification, other instruments should be considered.