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# Juvenile Sex-Only and Sex-Plus Offenders

## An Exploratory Study on Criminal Profiles

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In this study, research was done on the criminal profiles of a large group of juvenile sex-only and sex-plus (sex and other offenses) delinquents ( $N = 4,430$ ) in the Netherlands. Use was made of information from police records. Results show that sex-plus offenders start their careers earlier, that more of these offenders are of non-Dutch origin, that they commit more crimes, and will partly continue their criminal career after their adolescence. Juvenile sex-only offenders rarely go on committing crimes. In sex-plus offenders, sexual crimes play only a minor role in their total crime repertory. As time goes by, their criminal career will develop into the direction of property crimes. Finally, the implications and limitations of this study will be discussed.

**Keywords:** *comparative study; criminal profiles; juvenile sex offenders*

Juveniles who commit sexual crimes are often categorized as juvenile sex offenders. The sexual aspect of the criminal behavior is predominantly used to determine what type of delinquent the person is: a sex offender. Some studies indicate explicitly that these delinquents also commit other crimes; in many other studies, however, this fact is not mentioned.

A significant percentage of juvenile sex offenders has a history or record of nonsexual delinquency. Estimates have been made of 40% and 60% (Fehrenbach, Smith, Monastersky, & Deisher, 1986; Ryan, Miyoshi, Metzner, Krugman, & Fryer, 1996). However, it remains unclear if sexual offenses constitute the core of the total criminal profile of these juvenile delinquents. Becker and Kaplan (1988) proposed that after their first sexual offense, juveniles may choose one of the following three different behavioral pathways.

The first, the dead-end pathway, is when the juvenile stops committing any kind of crime. It has been estimated that approximately one half of all juvenile sex offenders

belong to the group of first offenders who will not continue (sexual) criminal activity. This group seems to include a subgroup of juveniles who, because of lack of experience, committed “experimental mistakes” in the process of discovering their sexuality, as well as a subgroup of youngsters who were overwhelmed by the consequences of their own criminal behavior. Because they do not want to be labeled as “sex offender” or because of these consequences, they decide to stop.

In the second pathway, juveniles will proceed to commit other crimes as well, such as property crimes and crimes of violence. These juveniles have been called “generalists” (Lussier, 2005; van Wijk & Ferwerda, 2000). The third pathway is based on sexual deviation. Juveniles who end up in this pathway commit mainly sexual crimes and are so-called specialists. Generalists form the greater part of the juveniles who continue committing crimes after their first sexual offense. The number of specialists forms only a small part of the total number of juveniles who sexually abuse others.

Various studies on recidivism confirm the picture that it is possible to differentiate between a general and a sexual recidivist. However, due to methodological differences, such as the length of the follow-up period and the different composition of the various groups in recidivism studies so far, it is difficult to get a clear picture of sexual recidivism (see, among others, Caldwell, 2002). The percentage of recidivism of sex offenders varies from 3% to 37% (for an overview, see Caldwell, 2002; Prentky, Harris, Frizzell, & Righthand, 2000; Sipe, Jensen, & Everett, 1998). The study of Långström (2002), which has an average follow-up period of 115 months, shows that 30% of juvenile sexual offenders will recidivate.

The percentage of recidivism when it comes to committing crimes in general also shows great variation. From a survey of various studies, it appears that the percentage for general recidivism is between 11% and 89% (Boyd, Hagan, & Cho, 2000). However, most of the studies arrive at a recidivism percentage of about 40% to 50% (e.g., Kahn & Chambers, 1991; Långström, 2002). A recent, and first Dutch study on recidivism of juvenile sex offenders confirms the above-mentioned percentages: 60% for general recidivism and 10% for sexual recidivism (Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2004b). In other words, the general criminal behavior of juveniles who sexually abuse others appears to play a more important role in the analysis of criminal behavioral patterns than sexual crimes will do.

It is known that juvenile sex offenders do form a heterogeneous group. There have been various attempts to classify juvenile sex offenders. Often, the type of crime committed is the basis of the classification. On one hand, there are “hands-off” crimes, such as exhibitionism and voyeurism, and on the other hand, there are “hands-on” crimes, such as sexual assault and rape (see, e.g., Saunders, Awad, & White, 1986). If the age of the victim forms a factor in classification, the “hands-on” crimes may be divided into rape and/or sexual assault of persons of the same age or older, and abuse of small children: the child molester (e.g., Hendriks & Bijleveld,

2004a; Hsu & Starzynski, 1990; Hunter, Figueredo, Malamuth, & Becker, 2003; Hunter, Hazelwood, & Slesinger, 2000; van Wijk, 1999).

However, from a recent study it appears that the criminal behavioral patterns of adult offenders in particular, in connection with sexual crimes, are mildly varied. Classification into various types may have some analytical value but does not always catch on in real situations (Heil, Ahlmeyer, & Simons, 2003). This study shows that about 90% of sex offenders are guilty of committing more types of sexual offenses; about 10% stick to only one type of sexual crime; this is a percentage that Abel et al. (1987) have also come across in their study. It appears that 78% of the delinquents who had abused children had also committed crimes against adults, and 52% of those who had raped adults had also abused minors. One also arrives at similar percentages when looking at other factors, such as gender and the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim (Heil et al., 2003). The various types of sex offenders found in various studies are not also easily distinguishable in practice.

A number of researchers has chosen another approach to the classification of sex offenders. Following Kempton and Forehand (1992), Butler and Seto (2002) divided juvenile sex offenders into those who commit only sexual crimes and those who also commit other crimes. They concluded that the first group have fewer behavioral problems, more prosocial attitudes, and run less risk of becoming recidivists than the sex offenders who commit other crimes as well. There are many similarities between this last group and nonsex offenders. It therefore seems advisable to consider the fact if juveniles who sexually abuse others exhibit homogenous or heterogeneous criminal patterns of behavior.

Based on information gathered from police records, criminal profiles of both groups have been studied, including some general information (nationality, age, and number of criminal antecedents). We have differentiated between *sex-only offenders*, those who commit only sex crimes, and *sex-plus delinquents*, those who also commit other crimes. Also research on the role of the sexual crime in the total criminal behavioral pattern of the sex offender was done. The questions concerning juveniles who sexually abused others were (a) What are the general characteristics of sex-only and sex-plus offenders? (b) How can one describe their criminal behavioral pattern? and (c) What role does sexual crime play in the total criminal behavioral pattern of the sex-plus offender?

## Method

### Research Population

In 2003, in the Netherlands about 59,000 juveniles came into contact with the police (van der Heide & Eggen, 2005). These juveniles have been registered in a police recognition system, the so-called HKS (*Herkenningsdienststelsysteem*) system. This

system is used nationwide, which means that all police regions use HKS, and at the regional level the police are able to add information, when necessary. The manner of putting data in is uniform, leading to the possibility of mutual exchange of information. The KLPD (Corps of National Police Services), and in particular the NRI (National Investigation Information) annually collects all HKS data from the police regions to compose a national crime information chart. With the help of a specially developed software program, called DEX 2000, the information from the various police corps is efficiently documented and presented and, where applicable, improved and taken together into one national database. This database does not contain information regarding convictions. All juvenile offenders in the current study had to be considered as suspects.

From 1996 to 2002, all sex offenders from this national database were grouped together. Persons in the current study were categorized as sex offenders if they were suspected of having committed at least one sex offense. In that period, there were 23,785 sex offenders. The juvenile sex offenders were selected from this group; that is, juveniles who after age 12 years (minimum age of criminal responsibility in the Netherlands) and before age 18 years were registered in police records as having committed one or more sex offenses, despite a possible career of nonsex offenses before their first sex offense. Of this selected group ( $N = 4,430$ ), the sex-only offenders ( $n = 1,945$ ), those who committed only sex offenses, were separated as a subgroup from the sex-plus group ( $n = 2,485$ ), those who committed sex and nonsex offenses. Although information from police records is not primarily intended for scientific research, HKS data have shown to be suitable for such purposes (Bijleveld, Meijers, & Prins, 2000).

## Analyses

General information (age, nationality, etc.) from both groups have been studied, using chi-square tests for categorical variables and  $t$  tests for constants. How a criminal career evolves was studied as follows. The (sex) offenses were arranged in chronological order, based on the closing date of the police report. Next, for each group we have determined the nature of the first offense and the offenses committed thereafter. It has to be clear that conclusions have been drawn on the group level and not on an individual basis. To do so, bivariate analyses were carried out, instead of analyzing follow-up periods on an individual level. This means that the size of both groups decreases after a time. The group that is registered for crimes becomes smaller all the time because a lot of youngsters will eventually stop their criminal activities (or will not be caught). It is consequently possible to define how a career evolves at group level and to determine mutual differences which may crop up.

Various sexual offenses are incorporated in the Penal Code of the Netherlands. All separate sexual offenses were categorized as follows:

- rape (penetration of the victim)
- sexual assault (without penetration)
- indecent liberties (with persons younger than age 16 years)

**Table 1**  
**General Characteristics of Sex-Only and Sex-Plus Offenders**

	Sex only <i>n</i> = 1,945		Sex plus <i>n</i> = 2,485		<i>t</i> test
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Age—first offense (in years)	15.2	1.5	14.7	1.5	$F(0.03)$ , $t = 10.876$ , $p = .000$
Age—last offense (in years)	15.5	2.6	19.2	6.4	$F(408, 14)$ , $t = -25.77$ , $p = .000$
Average # offenses	1.7	2.6	11.9	17.4	$F(740, 79)$ , $t = -28.70$ , $p = .000$
Period when sex offenses were committed (in years)	0.3	0.1	4.5	6.1	$F(755, 96)$ , $t = -31.86$ , $p = .000$
	Sex only (percentage)		Sex plus (percentage)		$\chi^2(1)$
Dutch origin	68.6		57.8		$53.92$ , $p = .000$
Non-Dutch origin	31.4		42.2		
Male	98.2		99.2		$7.96$ , $p = .005$
Female	1.8		0.8		

- exhibitionism
- other (child pornography, trafficking).

For nonsexual offenses, the main categories applicable to offenses were taken for the analyses:

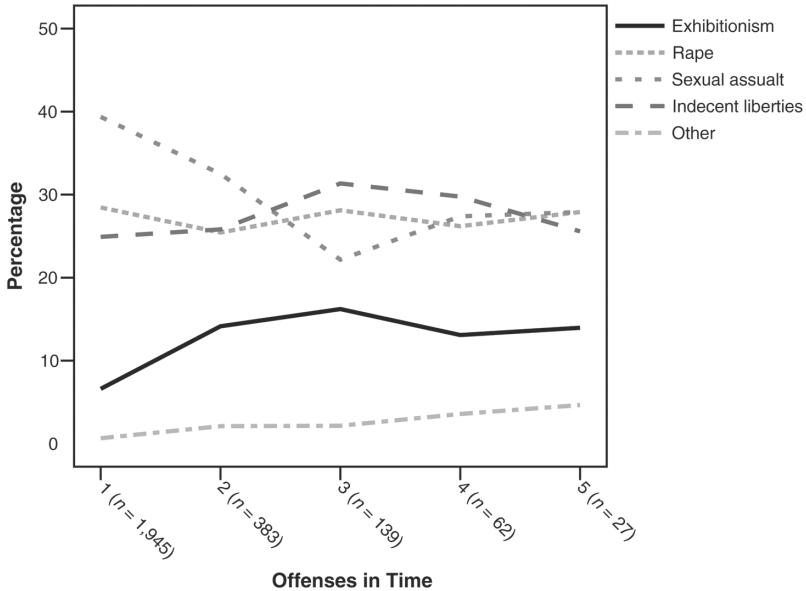
- violence (manslaughter, [attempted] murder, grievous bodily harm)
- offenses against property, either violent or nonviolent
- other (vandalism, public order, traffic offenses, drug offenses).

## Results

### General Characteristics

The sex-plus delinquents begin their criminal career at a significantly younger age and persist in this behavior for a longer period of time, in comparison with their sex-only counterparts (see Table 1). Sex-plus offenders are registered as having committed more offenses. The percentage of those of non-Dutch origin (e.g., Moroccans, Surinamese, and Antilleans) and males is larger in the group of sex-plus delinquents. Considering the age when the first and last offense was committed and the number of offenses, it will be observed that the sex-only delinquents as a whole hardly follow a lifestyle in committing sexual offenses.

**Figure 1**  
**Criminal Profile Sex-Only Offenders**



**Criminal Profiles**

It appears that the group sex-only offenders rapidly became smaller after their first registered sex offense (see Figure 1). Only a small group ( $n = 27$ ) is registered for a fifth sex offense. From the sex-only group, about 40% begin their sexual crimes with sexual assault, one fourth (24.9%) with indecent liberties, and more than one fourth (28.5%) with rape (see Figure 1). After the first offense, the group that engages in sexual assault decreased, while the percentages for rape and indecent liberties remained fairly stable up to the fifth offense, and the percentage of exhibitionism became only slightly larger.

From Figure 2 it can be deduced that almost one half (45.9%) of the sex-plus delinquents begin their career with a sexual offense, at least according to the information of the police records. About one fourth (27.1%) are registered for property offenses, and 13.1% for violent crimes. After the first offense, the percentage for sexual offenses drops: 32.4% for the second offense, and after the 10th offense about 11%. In contrast, the percentages of property crimes increase after the first offense: 33.4% for the second offense and, after the 10th, about 50%. The percentage of other offenses (vandalism, public disorder, trafficking, drugs) showed a slight increase. Property crimes become part of one's criminal career.

**Figure 2**  
**General Criminal Profile Sex-Plus Offenders**

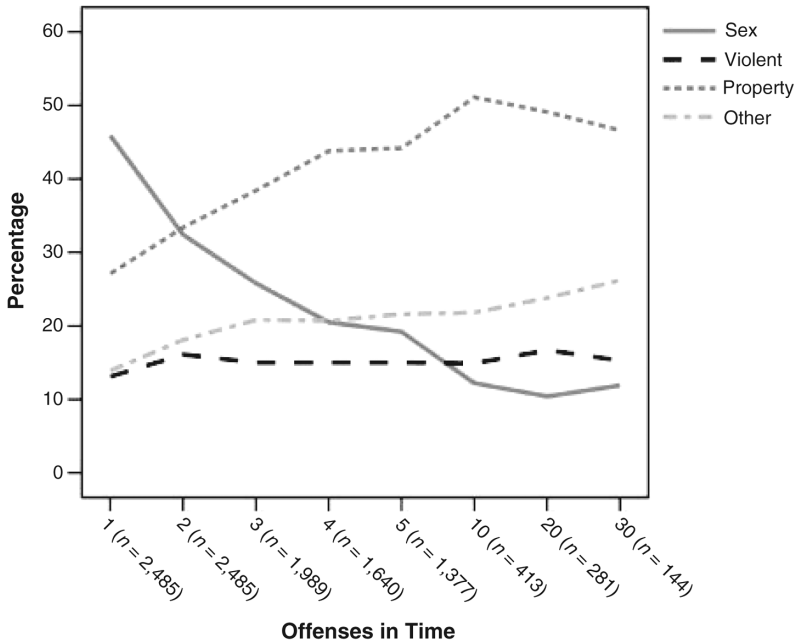


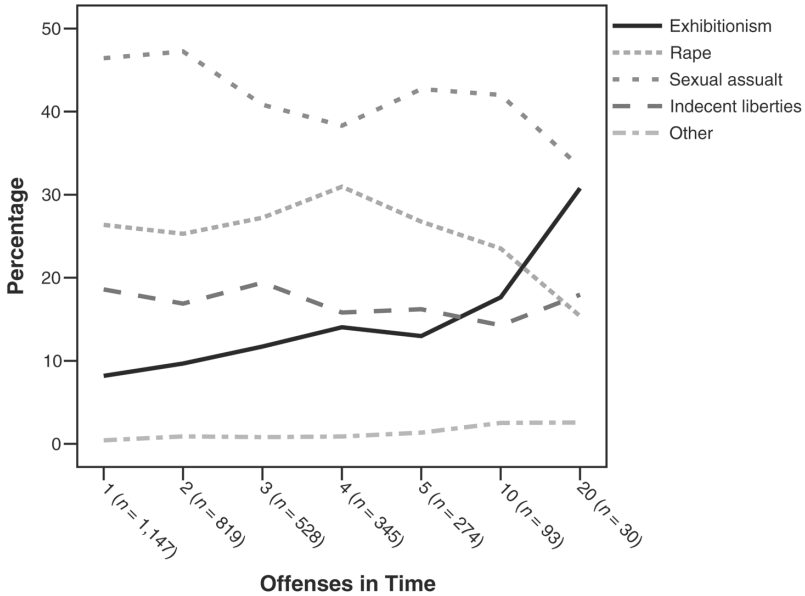
Figure 3 with regard to the sexual criminal profile of the sex-plus group is different, compared to that of the sex-only group. In almost one half of the cases (46.4%), they begin with sexual assault, and one fourth of the cases with rape (26.3%). After the first offense, the percentage of those who commit assault drops gradually, whereas the percentage who commits rape remains mildly stable. By the 10th offense, almost one half (42%) have been registered for sexual assault, more than one fourth (23.5%) for rape, and almost one fifth (17.7%) for exhibitionism, which increased to almost one third at the 20th offense, although the number of exhibitionists is quite small.

## Discussion

Based on information (HKS data), the criminal profiles of a large number of juvenile sex offenders can be drawn. A similar size of the group under investigation hardly occurs. The results taken from the current study clearly show that the criminal behavior of juvenile sex delinquents is not limited to sex, but that sexual offenses



**Figure 3**  
**Sexual Criminal Profile Sex-Plus Offenders**



form only a small part of a more varied pattern of criminal behavior. The question emerges when one should categorize a person as a “sex delinquent.” In other words: What kind of criteria should be used to classify a youngster as a juvenile sex offender?

Sex-only delinquents, juveniles who are registered for only having committed sexual offenses, hardly embark on a criminal career of sexual offenses (see also Becker & Kaplan, 1988). The stereotype image of the sex delinquent as a “specialist” who starts young and—sometimes—stays active during his or her entire lifetime, does not seem to match the information one can obtain from police records. Some sex-only offenders might be seen more correctly as “experimenters”: juveniles who happen to exceed the boundaries of their own sexuality, not because of any inner sexual deviancy, but as a consequence of “faulty experimentation.” In other words, this concerns juveniles who are not yet fully aware of what is and what is not considered as sexually appropriate behavior. Seen in this light, it is not surprising that sex-only offenders appear as a less problematic subject in other studies (Butler & Seto, 2002; Kempton & Forehand, 1992). When it comes to sex-only delinquents, we are most probably partially dealing with “first offenders.”

The fact that most sex-only offenders commit no other offenses after the first offense raises the question whether or not sufficient sanctions were used after the first offense has taken place, or whether the juvenile decided on his or her own to stop his or her starting criminal behavior. One aspect that merits further research might focus on the relationship between sanctions imposed and the noncontinuation of committing criminal sexual activities. In his review of recidivism studies, Lussier (2005) stated that only a minority of the offenders is at risk of sexual recidivism, particularly of those who received treatment. Up till now, only one Dutch study was available in which it was found that successful outpatient treatment of juvenile sex offenders results in lower general and sexual recidivism; untreated juveniles recidivated more on general offenses, such as violence (Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2005).

A far more smaller part of sex-only offenders does commit more sexual crimes. From the information from police records, though, it is not easy to distinguish how those, who stop after the first offense, differ from those who will continue. It is possible to categorize this last group as real sexual delinquents. We can also hypothesize that real sex offenders can be found among those who allegedly have stopped (i.e., they stop developing a police record) because of a change in modus operandi but simply continue in such a way that they no longer run any risk of being caught by the police.

Sex crimes play a much greater role in the careers of sex-plus offenders, based on the percentage that continues committing more sexual crimes. Apparently, perpetrating sex offenses does not stop them from committing other crimes. The sexual crimes committed form only a small part of what turns out to be a heterogeneous criminal career. The percentage made up of the other crimes remains mildly stable. Where we apply the possible factor of "experimentation" with the sex-only delinquents, with sex-plus delinquents, it is more a matter of exhibiting antisocial behavior in general, including committing sex offenses. This is in line with Lussier (2005) who found that most sex offenders do not restrict themselves to sex offenses, the so-called generality hypotheses, although sex offenders, in contrast with nonsex offenders, were more likely to commit another sex offense, the specialization hypotheses. Further research among juvenile sex and nonsex offenders is necessary to verify this finding.

A remarkable finding is that a significant number of the sex-plus offenders start their "career" with a sexual offense; however, this type of offense will quickly be replaced by property crimes. A plausible explanation for this finding is that juveniles committed other, minor offenses that went unnoticed by the police. Rape and other sex offenses may be an endpoint rather than a start of a criminal career; however, that does not appear from police records (see also Elliot, 1994; Loeber & Farrington, 1998). Based on the pattern found in the current study, we may say that the relative drop of sexual crimes is compensated by an increase of property crimes. This could be an indication that in the long run the sex-plus offenders choose material profits above immediate sexual gratification. An explanation for this pattern is that the offenders may have been punished for their serious offenses or received special treatment, as a result of

which they turned their attention to offenses with a lower risk of apprehension and (severe) sanctions. They may have become more rational in their delinquent behavior.

The percentage of delinquents of non-Dutch origin in the group of sex-plus delinquents is larger in comparison with the percentage in the group of sex-only offenders. This may indicate a reflection of the general overrepresentation of non-Dutch delinquents in crime statistics; however, this reflection cannot totally explain the size of the group. According to the HKS data, the percentages of non-Dutch juvenile delinquents who commit crimes of violence and property crimes are, respectively, 27.2% and 27.9%. It appears that non-Dutch delinquents will be found especially among those who are guilty of sexual assault and rape, namely 50.9% (van Wijk, Mali, Bullens, Prins, & Klerks, 2006). An interesting question could be whether or not this sexually offensive behavior might stem from cultural misunderstandings about Western norms and values, which deal with sexuality and/or antisocial lifestyles, or might be because of deviant sexual preferences. For instance, from the study of Murphy, DiLillo, Haynes, and Steere (2001), it appears that White juvenile sex offenders become more sexually excited by sexually deviant stimuli, in comparison with their African American counterparts. Also Långström (2004) suggested that sexual deviation does not form an important risk factor for ethnic minorities. Further research among different samples is desirable.

There are limitations in doing research on the development of criminal behavior among juvenile sex delinquents. It is known that statistics from police records only show a small part of the actual number of crimes committed in general. In the first place, this is because not all victims report the crime(s) committed against them, and in the second place, because the police do not investigate all the committed crimes.

This is especially true when it comes to sexual crimes or offenses. Estimates of the percentage of sexual crimes actually reported vary from 3% to 15% (Abel et al., 1987; Eggen, Kruisink, Panhuis, & van Blom, 2003; Frenken, Gijs, & van Beek, 1996; Herman, 1990; Russell, 1986). The dark number of sexual offenses is, considering the seriousness of the crimes, quite large. It appears that many of the reports that the police send to the public prosecutor's office are dropped, often because of technical reasons (e.g., lack of evidence); see, among others, Daalder and Essers (2003). Often, police investigators experience difficulty finding evidence to corroborate the statements of the alleged victim. That might also be the reason why many of these victims refuse to report the crime: It comes down to a "my-word-against-his" situation (van Wijk, 2004).

Considering the above-mentioned limitations, the results of the current study have implications for the use of the term *sex offender* and the manner in which one might deal with these offenders. What is important to know is that in a majority of the cases, the sexual offense committed does not necessarily give an indication of any persistence in committing this kind of offense. It rather signals the beginning of a life of crime in general, if the offender chooses to continue committing crimes. The fact that a person commits a sexual offense and follows it up with other kinds

of offenses should result in a person being registered as someone who commits a property crime (a thief) or a crime of violence rather than as a sex delinquent. For these offenders, a general corrective approach might be more suitable, with special attention given to cultural differences in the areas of sexuality and maintaining relationships with persons of the opposite sex, instead of methods of treatment, directly focused on the sexual aspect of the criminal behavior displayed. Of course, there will be a small group whose actions are determined by deviant sexual preferences and distortions. We are probably dealing here with abusers of small children, although a number of persons who commit sexual assault and/or rape, and also exhibitionists, could possibly as well be included in this group. Specific treatment, targeted toward correcting deviant sexual behavior, might be preferable for these offenders, who are the ones we might call "real" sex offenders. It may be a matter of vital importance to gain insight into those who are, or may be, part of this group. Problems of this specific kind should be spotted and addressed at an early stage. Recent developments in the standard procedures connected to dealing with these problems, for example, through the use of risk-assessment instruments, increases the quality of professional treatment and, hopefully as well, public safety in general (Bullens, Van Horn, Van Eck, & Das, 2005; van Wijk, 't Hart, Doreleijers, & Bullens, 2005).

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