

**ESTABLISHING VALIDITY OF THE FAMILY VIOLENCE SCREENER**

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**Catherine A. Bower B.S.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **ESTABLISHING VALIDITY OF THE FAMILY VIOLENCE SCREENER**

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Catherine A. Bower, B.S.

Texas State University-San Marcos

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**SUPERVISING PROFESSOR: G. MARC TURNER**

The Family Violence Screener (FVS) was developed to measure family violence exposure in high-risk adolescents, and to predict future family violence offenses in youths who had been exposed. There are few other measures of family violence, specifically those targeted at high-risk adolescents. The instruments currently in existence tend to be lengthy, lack rigor, are not reliable, or have not been administered to at-risk youth. The FVS was administered to over 11,000 times at the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department (TCJPD) over a four year period. A sample of 1,642 juvenile detainees was analyzed for the purposes of this research. The FVS was found to be significantly correlated with the MAYSI-2 Angry/Irritable sub-scale, as well as the nature offense. The FVS also appeared to be significantly correlated with the total number family violence offense charges. Discriminate and regression analyses suggested that the FVS is a strong predictor of family violence. Gender was also suggested to be a contributing factor to family violence, while age, ethnicity, non-violent offenses, and violent offenses were not

correlated to family violence. Future research may wish to compare the FVS with some or all of the other sub-scales in the MAYSI-2.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The Family Violence Screener (FVS) was developed by Dr. Eric Frey and the Assessment Center at the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department (TCJPD) in 2002. The instrument was created in an attempt to identify adolescents who are at high risk for perpetrating family violence. The FVS has not been explored to verify whether or not it is a valid instrument. Thus, no research has been conducted to determine if the FVS is measuring, or could even predict, family violence in delinquent adolescents. The purpose of this research is to conduct statistical analyses on the FVS to determine the degree to which the questionnaire is free of random error, and thus could be considered a valid and reliable measure. A variety of statistical procedures to establish reliability and validity were used to measure the reliability and validity of the FVS instrument.

According to Heilbrun, Cottle & Lee (2000), the issue in the juvenile justice system, is considering the nature of offenses following delinquency adjudication. This is important because the issue of recidivism involving *any* offense is of utmost pertinence, as opposed to the isolated violent behavior (Heilbrun, Cottle & Lee, 2000). Based on this assumption, factors that specifically contribute to family violence, as opposed to violence

in general will be distinguished. In other words, will children exposed to family violence be more likely to commit violent acts in contrast to adolescents who are not exposed to family violence?

Current instruments assessing adolescents' exposure to violence tend to describe few psychometric properties and characteristically lack rigor, not to mention that the majority do not specifically target family violence (Hastings & Kelley, 1996). Exposure to violence is often operationalized as an in depth structured or semi-structured interview (Giaconia, et al 1995). Other problems with existing violence assessment measures include: 1) complex and lengthy items, 2) lack both validity and test-retest reliability data, 3) participants lack exposure to lengthy exposure or pertinent single dramatic events of violence exposure, or 4) do not provide any indication of severity which have typically been associated with posttraumatic stress disorder (Hastings & Kelley, 1996).

Conducting analysis on the FVS is important as there are currently few validated instruments focusing specifically on delinquent adolescents and at-risk youths and their propensity to engage in family violence or other violent acts if exposure to family violence is high. Current family violence research predominately focuses on dating violence amongst teens, violence toward adult women in intimate relationships, or violence against the elderly (Nelson, Nygren, McInerney, & Klein, 2004; Ernst, et al 2002).

The current instrument, the Family Violence Screener (FVS), was developed for ease of use with language that is appropriate for adolescents aging in range from 10 to 17 who may be from a variety of educational and socio-economic backgrounds. The measure consists of only 23 items, insuring quickness and simplicity of use. Although some questions of the FVS address violence exposure factors associated with community,

school, individual and peer factors, and protective issues, the majority of questions are directly associated with family violence dynamics.

The FVS has currently been administered approximately 11,000 times to delinquent youths between 10 and 17 years of age. If the measure appears to be sound, statistically, it will be utilized by TCJPD to identify at-risk youths for appropriate intervention programs, and may also be used to predict the propensity for future violent or family violence offenses.

### ***Background of Family Violence***

#### *Child Abuse and Wife Beating; An Historical Perspective*

The subordinate status of women across the world's societies has been well documented (Straus & Gelles, 1986). It is also well documented that physical force tends to be an extremely effective way of keeping subordinate groups in their place, thus women have traditionally been the victims of physical assault (Straus, 1976). It wasn't long ago that men in the United States had a common law *right* to physically chastise their spouse and/or family members, hitting with an object. Straus and Gelles (1986) found that about two-thirds of the familial violence incidents were minor; such as slapping and throwing items, the other one-third were considered serious incidents such as punching, biting, kicking, hitting with an object, beating up, or assaults with a weapon such as a knife or gun.

It is well-known that children have been subjected to many cruelties, including death by exposure, inappropriate child labor laws, and ineffectual laws in general to protect children (Radbill, 1980). However, even today physical punishment of children is still legal in every state in the United States (Straus & Gelles, 1986). Most of us have seen a

child be either verbally accosted or physically reprimanded at the grocery store or in the shopping mall. However, the most harmful types of abuse occur behind the protective boundaries of family and home-life (Straus & Gelles, 1986).

A longitudinal study of over 2,000 couples revealed that at least one violent incident occurred in 16% of American families in 1976, which in a 10 year period afterward increased to 28% (Straus & Gelles, 1986). The Straus and Gelles (1986) study revealed that about two-thirds of the familial family violence incidents were minor, such as slapping and throwing items, the other one-third were considered serious incidents such as punching, biting, kicking. The rate of physical abuse in Straus and Gelles' (1986) study in 1976 revealed that almost 4% of children from age 3 to 17 had experienced a "Very Severe" incident on their Violence Index, with 1.7 million children qualifying as being "abused" that year. They reported that rate has risen by 10% every year in the 1970s, and that only 6% of those reported every year were a single abusive incident (Straus & Gelles, 1986). In Texas, domestic violence has steadily increased from 1998 to present (TDPS, 2006). In 2005 the Texas Department of Public Safety recorded 187,811 domestic violence incidents, with over 17, 000 children being sheltered in the same year for domestic violence exposure (TDPS, 2006).

#### *Defining Family Violence and the Effects on Adolescent Exposure*

The term "abuse" is typically restricted but not limited to family and intimate relationships, which can include sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. "Violence" on the other hand is defined, for the purposes of this research, as an act carried out with intention, or perceived intention, of causing physical pain or injury to another person (APA, 2006; Straus & Gelles, 1986). While the term "Family Violence" is defined as in the previous

definition but enacted toward family members; including parents, children, step-parents and step-siblings, grandparents, or any individual that is living with or closely related to the perpetrator or victim of a violent act (APA, 2006).

The Family Violence Survey (FVS) was developed based upon the family violence criterion that was developed by the American Psychological Association. *Violence and the Family: Report of the APA Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family* (APA, 2006), defined family violence and abuse as a range of physical, sexual, and emotional maltreatment by one family member against another, including; child abuse, partner abuse, dating violence, elder abuse, and adult survivors of childhood abuse. The APA (2006) elaborated on the term “family” as including a variety of relationships outside of heritage and/or marriage, identifying that all forms of abuse may occur in a wide variety of relationships. Women and children of color and of others “outside the majority culture” were especially likely to *not* report abuse (APA, 2006). The APA (2006) further emphasizes aspects of the perpetrator's misuse of power, control, and authority, thus enabling abuse to take place and continue in the family system.

External risk factors of family violence include explicit socio-cultural and interpersonal influences (including a history of previous violence), as well as alcohol and other drug abuse in the home (APA, 2006). Societal attitudes, the presence of guns, and childhood excessive viewing violence in the media, have all been shown to significantly affect future violent behaviors (APA, 2006). The report also indicates that economics plays a role in the cycle of family violence.

Abuse occurs in all segments of the population, however middle-class abusers tend to be less likely to actually file an abuse report, while children from impoverished homes

tend to be at extraordinarily high risk for being abused or assaulted (APA, 2006). Juvenile delinquents or those likely to engage in violent offenses, typically share the traits described by the APA (2006). The FVS and statistical findings associated with the FVS may help to shed light on this previously neglected population associated with family violence.

The APA (2006) indicated internal factors which may contribute to the likelihood of family violence. These include family structure, being or feeling unwanted, child resemblance to someone the parent dislikes, or the child having physical or behavioral traits that make the child unique in a way that the parent feels is difficult to care about (APA, 2006). If a parent was sexually or physically abused as a child, they are much more likely to perpetrate violence against their children (APA, 2006).

The most disturbing problem in this population of abused and/or delinquent children is that a certain majority of them tend to show a variety of initial psychological, emotional, and cognitive effects that tend to last long-term and may contribute to them engaging in delinquent behaviors (APA, 2006). For example, Carlson (1990) found children and adolescents who witnessed marital violence were more likely to develop depressive symptoms, run away from home, and act violently toward dating partners. The same study (Carlson, 1990) also found significant differences between males and females who witnessed interparental violence.

Males exposed to violence were more likely to have run away, have suicidal thoughts, enact violence upon their mothers (or engage in familial violence), and develop a pattern of adjustment problems similar to significantly abused boys (Carlson, 1990). Depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have also been found to be positively correlated with exposure to family conflict and family violence, feelings of victimization,

hopelessness, and a lack of purpose in life (McClosky, & Walker, 2000; DuRant, et al 1995).

Most importantly, the amount of exposure to parent-child violence and amount of interparental violence witnessed were found to be significant predictors of both internalizing and externalizing behavior problems (Achenbach, 1987; O'Keefe, 1996). A high occurrence of violence exposure is regularly found in adolescents with psychological diagnoses, juvenile delinquents, and inner-city adolescents (Hastings & Kelley, 1997; Steiner, Garcia, & Matthews, 1997; Schubiner, Scott, & Tzelepis, 1993). Significant effects were also found for the interaction between parent-child violence and interparental violence (O'Keefe, 1996). "Children need not be directly beaten to take on violent and delinquent behavior; it is enough for them to merely witness one adult abusing another" (Buel, 2002, p.1). However, just because a child has been victimized in the past does not justify their future violent acts, but it does help to explain how some adolescents implement a violent model of conflict resolution (Beul, 2002).

Self-destructive behavior is common among adolescents, however adolescents tend to act out in crisis or violence when healthy autonomy is not achieved in the family (Greenwood, 2005). In fact, this kind of self-destructive behavior is indicative of deeply rooted emotional trauma that is closely linked to continual family upheaval (Greenwood, 2005). The APA (2006) goes on to explain the essential importance of treatment and intervention, which has shown over and over in previous research, to be extremely effective in breaking the cycle of family violence and abuse. Buel (2002) espouses that the courts are an excellent venue to address the problems of family violence, for victims, abusers, and/or both, because the court can tailor make case dispositions that include a

balance of punishment and rehabilitation where the adults and adolescent are held responsible.

Implementing intervention programs is considered a “management-oriented assessment approach,” the goal of which is risk reduction (Heilbrun, et al, 2000). However, most management-oriented approaches involve several administrations over time to detect change in the individual in order to better tailor interventions. In this respect, the FVS is predicted to be a more stable, general assessment of family violence exposure, even though the FVS will be administered several times if the child persists in committing offenses.

It is also hypothesized that the FVS may predict family violence or violent behavior in youths exposed to family violence. The “prediction-oriented approach” is defined as determining the probability that a specific event or behavior will occur within a specific or given period of time (Heilbrun, et al, 2000). In the latter approach, a single prediction is made, while the former approach often includes ongoing legal jurisdiction (as continued offenses occur), such as sentencing, or conditions of probation or conditions of release (Heilbrun, et al, 2000). The TCJPD will most likely use a combination of these two approaches to best implement an effective strategy.

According to adolescent specialists who assess risk in delinquent youth (Heilbrun, Cottle, & Lee, 2000), there are 3 essential questions which must be asked while conducting risk assessment: 1) “What is the outcome being assessed?” 2) “What is the duration of the outcome period (period over which the assessment is projected?)” and 3) “What is the purpose of the assessment”? The FVS (totals and/or factors) will be compared to the nature of the crime with which the juvenile was charged, as well as to the angry/irritable



sub-scale on the Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument II (MAYSI-2) (Grisso, 2006). It is important to consider the age of the youth for this type of risk assessment as evidence suggests that some juveniles tend to discontinue their delinquent behavior upon entering adulthood (Grisso, 1998). Thus, future offenses may be more closely associated with the age of the delinquent behavior as opposed to the type of offense committed (Grisso, 1998).

Travis County (or the TCJPD) is considered to be one the more forward thinking and progressive adolescent detainment facilities in the country (Beul, 2002). The TCJPD's programs for family violence intervention are considered to be a model for many other detainment facilities (Beul, 2002). In fact, it is not uncommon for adolescent detainment facilities to have little or no psychologists on site, nor do they have adequate psychological assessment in place to implement intervention strategies at all. TCJPD is considered a model for the nation largely because only two other adolescent detainment facilities in the United States have intervention for those exposed to family violence. Seattle WA., and Santa Clara, CA., are currently the only adolescent facilities who are intervening or attempting to intervene with families and adolescents exposed to family violence (Beul, 2002).

The primary goal of the family violence intervention strategies employed at TCJPD is to "identify and treat battered or battering youths, and to prevent the inter-generational cycle from repeating itself while making our homes, communities and schools safe" (Beul, 2002, p.2). For practical purposes, this research has predominately explored "traditional" means of abuse. Although it is quite common, there is little research or media coverage regarding abusive teens. Often, when an adult family member is the victim of an abusive teen, the family member is abused by another adult family member as well (Beul, 2002).

Buel (2002) describes three main problems and “non-traditional” types of abuse, facing the juvenile courts concerning domestic violence. The primary problem is when a child’s exposure or perpetrating of abuse is not readily apparent, as it is an underlying cause of delinquent behavior. In this instance, a child is brought to the court under a non-violent offense. So if the court engages in direct inquiry (or by administering the FVS), the abuse is revealed. The second form of abuse occurs when the adolescent batters a parent, caretaker, sibling, or other household member. The third form involves the physical abuse of an intimate partner, or toward the person who the abusive teen is dating (Beul, 2002). Often, family violence goes undetected by the courts, however these aforementioned forms tend to be especially ignored (Beul, 2002).

The Massachusetts Department of Youth Services revealed shocking statistics of children exposed to family violence. They found that 24% were more likely to attempt suicide, 24% were highly likely to commit a sexual assault or offense, 50% were likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, and most pertinent, 75% were likely to commit a violent offense toward a person in the home (Guarino, 1985). One of the main goals of using the FVS as an assessment tool, is to expedite case handling so that the at-risk youth can be put into treatment as soon as possible (Beul, 2002). The judge at TCJPD also works with the intake staff to ensure that family violence is assessed in conjunction with the MAYSI-2, as the latter instrument does not address family violence per se.

### *Overview of the FVS*

The TCJPD Assessment Center developed the Family Violence Screener (FVS) to identify youth who are at high risk for perpetrating family violence. TCJPD typically recommends that adolescents who have a charge of Family Violence, or a family history of

violence, attend a TCJPD intervention group (STOP Family Violence) or Juvenile Anger Management [JAM]. The STOP Group was developed at the request of the Youth Intervention Committee; a sub-group of the Austin & Travis County Family Violence Task Force (ATCFVTF). The ATCFVTF is made up of “public, private and non-profit organizations that provide law enforcement, legal, judicial and social services related to domestic violence” (ATCFVTF, 2006). The purpose of this task force is to improve the delivery of services and to reduce domestic violence in Austin/Travis County.

STOP is an intervention program offered at the TCJPD for perpetrators and their families. It is typically recommended for detainees and their families who have a history of family violence. If an adolescent has been charged with a family violence offense, he/she and their family members are either recommended to STOP by the adolescents’ intervening probation officer or by the judge overseeing the adolescents’ case. The STOP group is a 2 hour course offered once a week for a duration of 6 weeks. Families are taught about the cycle of violence, and given coping strategies to better handle angry or violent outbursts amongst family members.

JAM is offered solely to the child (as opposed to the family) by the TCJPD. Again, either the probation officer or the judge may request a child to JAM. Adolescents referred to JAM have a propensity to act out in violence and anger, or have committed a violent offense. JAM meets two days a week for two weeks. Both programs are facilitated by qualified psychologists (either holding a Master’s or Doctoral degree) and volunteer mentors (usually undergraduate or graduate psychology students). Both groups are overseen by Dr. Frey, the leading psychologist at TCJPD.

Several individuals are often involved with the detained adolescent. The judge, the probation officer, and the psychological assessment team are those who tend to have the most impact on treatment for the adolescent. The child and family typically must report to the probation officer frequently, thus the probation officer may notice family dynamics or patterns of behavior that a singular offense may not shed light upon. The probation officer can then request psychological assessments or request the judge's intervention (such as in requesting JAM or STOP) during the court proceedings. The FVS can also be an important part of this process by aiding the probation officer, the judge, and the assessment team at the juvenile court.

The FVS was based upon factors shown in other research to be typically associated with juvenile dating and family violence (APA, 2006). It was designed with the intention of identifying adolescent detainees who are at risk for future family violence or aggressive outbursts.

In order to validate The Family Violence Screener (FVS), three separate studies were conducted to establish the reliability of the measure. The first 2 analyses were conducted by the TCJPD. Primarily, internal consistency was assessed by analyzing the extent to which a set of items measures the trait or characteristic (s) of family violence. The third and most recent study was conducted for the purposes of the current research. This research analyzed the FVS with more in-depth statistical procedures (such as concurrent validity) by comparing total FVS scores to the Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument (MAYSI-2) (Grisso, 2006), and to the total number of offenses grouped by type of offense. Offenses were categorized based on whether they are "Violent," "Non-Violent," or "Family Violence."

Protection of the identity of the juvenile was essential for this research. Data collected on initial detainment of each individual at TCJPD were coded with an innocuous participant identification numeral, or “PID number.” This “PID number” is the only identifying information given for the purposes of this research. The researcher was cleared by Travis County to view confidential and personal information of detained juveniles at the TCJPD. The researcher has worked at TCJPD for the past year as her graduate practicum. However, to ensure that the identity and personal information of each juvenile will be entirely protected, the TCJPD research department transposed raw data for analysis.

Though no formal consent process takes place with detainees, all detainees are permitted to refuse the standard mental health, substance use, and FVS (part of the standard intake procedure) if they so wish with no penalty.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

A pilot study was conducted by Dr. Frey and TCJPD in 2002, using a convenience sample of adolescent detainees. The first version of the instrument was administered to sixty (N=60) youth to test the ease of use and item variability (or variance) between items. Participants in the sample ranged in age from 12 to 17 and were mostly male. The sample was comprised of African-American (n=18), Hispanic (n=31), White (n=8), and other (n=3) ethnicities. The original measure consisted of twenty-five items with a 3-point Likert-type response for each item. Participants indicated whether the item “Never,” “Sometimes,” or “Often,” described them and their experiences best.

The FVS was administered as part of the TCJPD intake process for detainees. Detainees are given several instruments to complete, the FVS among them. If a child had difficulty reading he/she was read each item. The FVS was administered via computer, and detainees were given the option to participate voluntarily or not in the battery of tests administered. All detainees identities were kept anonymous by an innocuous “PID” number, with only cleared and specially trained TCJPD employees having access to identifying information of the participants. In response to participant feedback, the wording of some items was changed to improve readability.

Following the initial pilot study, a follow up study was conducted using the revised 23-item measure to a sample of 211 youth. Again, the sample was predominantly male (n=135 male, n=72 female) and Hispanic (n=188 Hispanic, n=49 Black, n=32 White, & n=8 Other). A total of 42 questionnaires were eliminated due to missing or incomplete responses, bringing the total number of questionnaires evaluated to 173 (n=173).

Item variance and internal consistency were examined to identify items with low variability or low item-total correlations. Cronbach Alpha was computed as an index of reliability ( $\alpha=.75$ ). Factor analysis with Varimax rotation revealed two significant factors, however the second factor was minimal, loading only four (4) of the twenty-three (23) items. Further examination showed that removal of two (2) of the twenty-five (25) items would increase the overall reliability of the instrument, as they were negatively correlated with the total score. By dropping the two items in question, reliability was raised to alpha = .82. The revised 23-item version became the official version of the FVS and is presented in Table 1. The revised 23-item version was then converted to a computer-administered format and is administered to all youth who are referred to the department.

**Figure 1: 23-Item Family Violence Screener (FVS).**

For each question below, check “Never” if it is not true for you, “Sometimes” if it is true for you some of the time, or “Often” if it is true for you a lot of the time.

	Never	Sometimes	Often
1. I make D's and F's in school.	0	0	0
2. If I get in trouble, I can talk to my parent/guardian about it.	0	0	0
3. People tease me.	0	0	0
4. I am safe in my neighborhood.	0	0	0
5. People in my family insult each other.	0	0	0
6. I get into fights at school.	0	0	0
7. I spend a lot of time at home alone, without adults.	0	0	0
8. We can afford to pay our bills every month.	0	0	0
9. People in my house have made me mad enough to push, slap, hit or kick them.	0	0	0
10. People in my house get drunk.	0	0	0
11. When I get mad, I threaten to hurt others.	0	0	0
12. Besides in the movies or TV, I have seen someone shot, stabbed, hit with a weapon, run over, or mugged.	0	0	0
13. My family has been reported to CPS.	0	0	0
14. People in my house take illegal drugs.	0	0	0
15. I can walk away or calm down when someone makes me mad.	0	0	0
16. I have runaway to avoid violence in my home.	0	0	0
17. My parent/guardian says bad things about me.	0	0	0
18. When I get mad, I stay mad for more than 20 minutes.	0	0	0
19. People in my house push, slap, hit, or kick each other.	0	0	0
20. I have been accused of assault.	0	0	0
21. When I get mad at my girl/boyfriend, I push, slap, hit or kick her/him.	0	0	0
22. People in my house throw things when they are mad.	0	0	0
23. +	0	0	0

TOTAL SCORE = \_\_\_\_\_



## **CHAPTER 3**

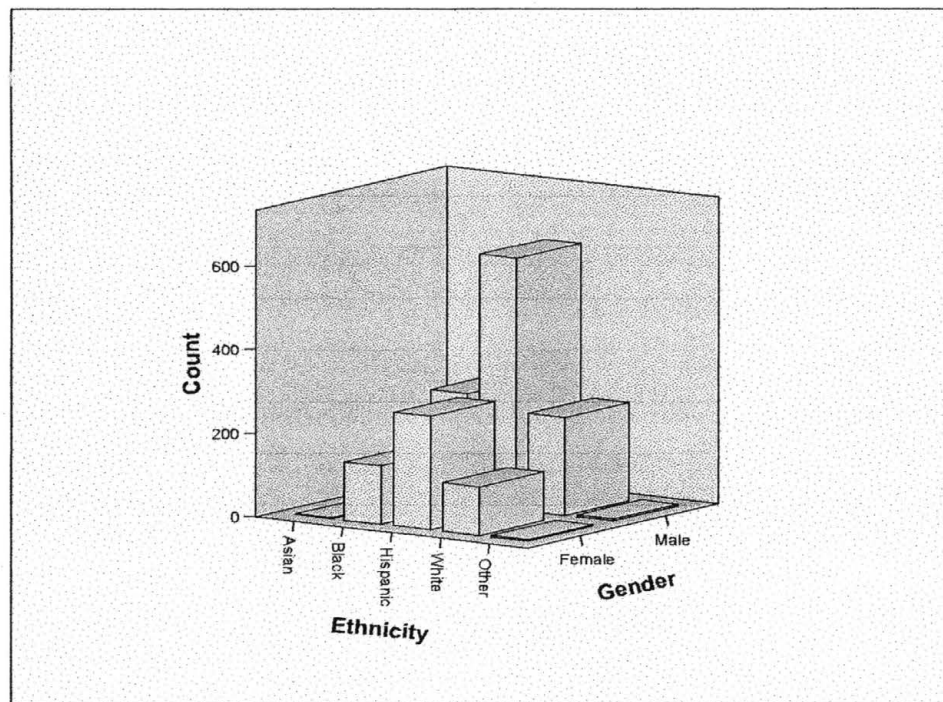
### **CURRENT RESEARCH**

The purpose of the present study is to further examine the reliability and validity of the FVS. It is believed that the FVS will be significantly related to the nature of the offense committed and the number of Family-Violence charges. Additionally, externalizing behaviors are expected from adolescents who have been exposed to excessive family violence. It is hypothesized that those who score high on the FVS would also score high on the MAYS-2 Angry/Irritable sub-scale. It is expected that there will be some degree of relationship with the MAYSI-AI sub-scale, however the FVS is designed to measure distinct factors associated with family violence.

#### **Methods**

##### *Participants*

Data collected from a sample of 1642 youths who were administered the FVS between June 15, 2005 to June 15, 2006, was used for this research. The sample was mostly male (n=1110 males, n=532 females). Participants ranged in age from 10 to 17. Detainees, whose age was listed as older than 17 were considered typographical or computational errors as no one over the age of 17 is admitted to TCJPD. Information from these participants was removed from the sample. And, as in prior studies, Hispanics comprised the majority of the sample (African-American (n=401), Hispanic (n=873), White (n=348), and "Other" (n=20).

**Figure 2: Demographics, Study 3.**

The subjects were identified by an anonymous “PID” number, assigned to the detainee upon initial arrest. The researcher did not have access to names, addresses, or other identifiable information of the subject in this research project. However, the researcher had been cleared by the TCJPD approval process, which consisted of an in depth background check, confidentiality training, and departmental procedure (including departmental confidentiality, ethics, and standards) in 2005. Although it is not law, standard ethical procedures in law enforcement, including the media, have strict policies of not releasing or connecting juvenile’s names with their crimes. Only the detainee’s probation officer would have the ability to link the anonymous ID number to the subject

### *Material & Procedures*

The revised measure consisted of 23-items with a Likert-type response for each item. Participants indicated whether the item ‘Never,’ ‘Sometimes,’ or ‘Often,’ best described them and their experiences (see Figure 1). The FVS was administered as part of the intake process for all youth referred to the TCJPD.

Upon detainment, the adolescents were given several instruments to complete during the TCJPD intake process, the FVS among them. If a child had difficulty reading he/she was read each item. The detained adolescents were given the option to participate voluntarily or not in the battery of tests administered. All detained adolescents’ identities were kept anonymous by an innocuous “PID” number, with only cleared and specially trained TCJPD employees.

Data was requested from TCJPD Assessment Department. Clearance to release and analyze data was granted by Dr. Frey and TCJPD. Data was compiled by the Assessment Department at TCJPD and released to the researcher with all identifying information removed. Data was then analyzed in SPSS.

To assess the reliability of the FVS coefficient alpha was evaluated as measure of internal consistency. Underlying causal structure of the FVS was hypothesized. Another statistical procedure utilized included exploratory factor analysis which is typically used to identify common underlying constructs among a group of variables. Factor analysis provides evidence to show if the relations between items on a test are consistent with underlying theoretical construct or constructs.

To assess the validity, the FVS totals were compared to the Massachusetts Adolescent and Youth Screening Instrument-II (MAYSI-2). The MAYSI-2 has well

established its reliability, concurrent validity, and clinical utility and is highly esteemed as a brief screening tool for youths in the juvenile justice system.

The MAYSI-2 (Grisso, 2000) is a self-report inventory of 52 questions. The MAYSI consists of seven subscales of behavior, measuring situational and characterological distress. "Caution" and "Warning" scores are provided for each subscale. Youths answer "yes" or "no" concerning whether each item has been true for them "within the past few months." The MAYSI-2 requires a fifth grade reading level and takes approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The MAYSI-2 is designed to assist juvenile justice facilities in identifying youths 12 to 17 years of age who may have special mental health needs. The instrument was initially designed in 1990 and was updated in 1999. The MAYSI-2 has well established its reliability, concurrent validity, and clinical utility and is highly esteemed as a brief screening tool for youths in the juvenile justice system (Grisso, 2000). It is predicted that the "*Angry-Irritable*" sub-scale on the MAYSI-2 will be highly correlated with scores on the FVS.

The MAYSI-2 response items have been delineated into 7 sub-scales including, 1) Alcohol/Drug Use (frequent use of alcohol/drugs or risk of abuse), 2) Depressed-Anxious (experiences depressed and anxious feelings/ risk of depression or anxiety disorders), 3) *Angry-Irritable* (experiences frustration, lasting anger, moodiness/ risk of angry reaction, fighting, aggressive behavior), 4) Somatic Complaints (experiences bodily aches/pains associated with distress), 5) Suicide Ideation (thoughts and intentions to harm oneself, risk of suicide attempts or gestures), 6) Thought Disturbance--Boys only (unusual beliefs and perceptions, risk of thought disorder), 7) Traumatic Experiences (lifetime exposure to traumatic experiences such as abuse, rape, observed murder) (Grisso, 2000).

Because the MAYSI-2 is considered as highly reliable and valid, the first administration of the MAYSI-2, *Angry/Irritable Sub-Scale*, given to the detainee between the dates of June 15, 2005 and June 15, 2006 were analyzed. In conjunction with the MAYSI-2 *Angry/Irritable Sub-Scale*, the FVS was compared to the *nature of the adolescents' offense* as well as the *total number of offenses* in each of the offense categories. To accurately assess the adolescents' offense history, all of the child's offenses were compiled from their first offense committed to last offense or charge on or before October 10, 2006. Clearly, some adolescents will have future charges, however it was assumed that due to the number of participants, an accurate view of the nature of offense and total number of offenses in each category would be accurate. Offenses were separated into 3 categories: 1) Non-Violent, 2) Violent, and 3) Family Violence. Figure 3 shows that only a charge "aggressive assault toward date/family/ or house" or "assault toward sate, family, or house" was considered as a *family violence offense*. *Violent offenses* included all other aggressive assaults and assaults, and any other offense that directly affected the safety of another. *Non-violent offenses* included all other charges.

**Figure 3: Family Violence/ Violent/ Non-Violent Offenses Categorized.**

<u>Family Violence</u>	<u>Violent</u>	<u>Non-Violence</u>
<u>AGG ASSAULT</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Date/Family, House</li> </ul> <u>ASSAULT</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family/Date/House</li> </ul>	<u>AGG ASSAULT:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual</li> <li>• Sexual Child</li> <li>• Public Servant</li> <li>• Weapon Injury</li> <li>• Aggravated Robbery</li> <li>• Kidnapping</li> <li>• Agg, Sexual Assault</li> <li>• Arson: w/ bodily injury or death</li> </ul> <u>ASSAULT</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Threat or contact w/ injury (person/causes bodily injury, public servant/ assault threaten bodily injury)</li> <li>• Coerce gang membership bodily injury</li> <li>• Deadly Conduct</li> <li>• Violence</li> <li>• Indecency with a Child/ Elderly/Invalid/ or Exposure</li> <li>• Murder</li> <li>• Robbery</li> <li>• Theft From Person</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arson</li> <li>• Burglary (habitation, building, vehicle)</li> <li>• Class C</li> <li>• Coerce gang membership</li> <li>• Computer breach</li> <li>• Credit card abuse</li> <li>• Criminal Mischief</li> <li>• Trespass/ w/ weapon, habitation</li> <li>• Curfew Violation</li> <li>• Dangerous Drug/ Drug free zone</li> <li>• Disorderly Conduct</li> <li>• Disruption of Classes</li> <li>• DWI/DUI</li> <li>• Engage Org. Criminal Activity</li> <li>• Escape/ Evade arrest</li> <li>• Fail to ID fugitive</li> <li>• False ID</li> <li>• Fail to attend school</li> <li>• False Alarm</li> <li>• Gambling</li> <li>• Graffiti</li> <li>• Harassment</li> <li>• Drug Poss, Dist, Public Intox/ MIP/</li> </ul>

**Figure 3: Family Violence/ Violent/ Non-Violent Offenses Categorized Cont.**

<b><u>Family Violence</u></b>	<b><u>Violent</u></b>	<b><u>Non-Violence</u></b>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Intox/ Possession Crack, Control Substance, Marijuana, Cocaine, etc...</li> <li>• Retaliation</li> <li>• Place weapons Prohibited</li> <li>• Prohibited Weapon/ Switchblade, Knuckles</li> <li>• Public Lewdness</li> <li>• Reckless Damage, Driving</li> <li>• Resist Arrest</li> <li>• Retaliation</li> <li>• Runaway</li> <li>• Sanction/ Bench Warrant/</li> <li>• Court Order/ Viol of Court Order</li> <li>• Terroristic Threat/ Terr. threat causes fear</li> <li>• Theft</li> <li>• Trespass</li> <li>• Truancy</li> <li>• Unauth. use of MV</li> <li>• Unk Misdemeanor</li> <li>• Unl carrying weapon/ or carrying of weapon</li> <li>• VCR or Court Order Warrant</li> </ul>

## **Results**

### *Reliability*

Item analysis of the original data obtained from TCJPD resulted in a coefficient alpha of .79. Closer examination revealed that item 2 was negatively correlated with the total score. After reading the item more closely it was decided that the item should have been reversed score but hadn't in the data originally obtained, so the item was reverse scored by the researcher. A second look at the internal consistency of the instrument revealed that remove of item number 22 would increase from the coefficient alpha from .79 to .81.

Principal Axis Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation was conducted in order to determine if one, or several, dominate factors could describe a set of items from the FVS specifically associated with family violence. This analysis was conducted using both the full 23 item scale and the scale with item 22 removed based on the results of the internal consistency analysis done previously. Based on the results of both analyses a single, dominant factor accounted for approximately 22.97% of the variance. However when factor loadings of items were reviewed, there was not a clearly identifiable pattern in the loadings with many items loading equally on multiple factors. Although several factors seemed to contribute to the overall variance, due to overlapping of item loadings, it was difficult to identify what the main factor separate from the other items.

Based on the results of the internal consistency analysis and the factor analysis, it was decided that a total score of items from the FVS, excluding item 22, would be appropriate for use in later procedures.



Test/re-test reliability was examined, although the correlation was significant ( $p < .01$ ), the variance accounted for was lower than expected (see Table 1). Please see the Discussion section for further information, as participants scores did not appear to be consistent over time and across applications. 2, 3, and 4, applications of the instrument were evaluated and no conclusive data was obtained. Pearson correlations were much lower than expected and it was not clear as to what factors may have contributed to the lack of test/re-test reliability.

**Table 1: Test/ Re-test Reliability.**

	Admin. 1	Admin. 2	Admin. 3	Admin. 4
Admin. 1				
Pearson	1.00	.58*	.48*	.45*
N	791	791	358	177
Admin. 2				
Pearson		1.00	.64	.45
N		791	358	177
Admin. 3				
Pearson			1.00	.50
N			358	177
Admin. 4				
Pearson				1.00
N				177

*\* significance at the .01 level, two-tailed.*

### *Validity*

To help establish divergent validity, the total FVS score was correlated with the MAYSI-2 Angry/Irritable sub-scale and the nature of offense. There was a moderate correlation between the MAYSI-2 Angry/Irritable sub-scale score of each participant and the total FVS score ( $r = .604$ ,  $N = 1619$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This would seem to indicate that although there is some similarity in what is measured by the two instruments, they are in fact measuring different constructs.

Regarding the nature of offenses, the total number of non-violent charges appeared to have no correlation with the FVS ( $r = .012$ ,  $N = 1611$ ,  $p > .05$ ) nor with the number of violent offenses ( $r = -.017$ ,  $N = 1611$ ,  $p > .05$ ). However, there was a weak, but significant correlation between the number of family violence offenses and the FVS total ( $r = .211$ ,  $N = 1614$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This could be interpreted to mean that the FVS is evaluating characteristics unique to family violence. Also, there was a weak, but statistically significant relationship between gender and scores on the FVS, with females tending to score higher than males ( $r = .192$ ,  $N = 1642$ ,  $p < .05$ ). A similar pattern of relationships was found with the MAYSI AI sub-score, however the MAYSI AI sub-score was more strongly related to gender and less related to both the nature and number of offenses.

FVS scores from the participants were divided into three groups based on the nature of the offense (non-violence, violent, family violence). The mean differences between the groups were examined using a single factor, independent measures ANOVA revealing that those in the family violence condition scored significantly higher on the FVS than other groups [ $F(2, 1611) = 50.2$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .059$ ]. Descriptive statistics for the three groups can be found in Table 2.

**Table 2: Descriptives Nature of Offense.**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<b>Non-Violent</b>	999	8.91	5.58
<b>Violent</b>	364	9.22	5.71
<b>Family Violence</b>	249	6.28	6.28
<b>Total</b>	1612	9.60	5.89

Concurrent validation analyses revealed an apparent correlation with type of offense (non-violent, violent, & family violence) and FVS total ( $r = .214$ ,  $N = 1612$ ,

$p < .001$ ). The most interesting correlation existed between the FVS Total and Family Violence. The FVS, as well as the MAYSI-2 Angry/Irritable subscale, showed significant correlations with the number of family violence charges, while they did not appear to be significantly correlated with the total number of violent charges nor the total number of non-violent charges. This suggests that the FVS may have predictive qualities that seem to explain variance uniquely to family violence.

To further investigate what the FVS may be assessing in relation to the unique variance accounted for by family violence and gender, regression and discriminate analysis were conducted. A stepwise regression analysis was performed using FVS total, MAYSI AI sub-scores, gender and ethnicity as possible predictor variables. The results suggested that the FVS total scores could serve as a better predictor of the number of family violence charges than any other factor entered into the analysis. The proportion of variation in the number of family violence charges accounted for though was fairly weak. The FVS appeared to account for only 4.5% of the variance. With gender added as a second predictor, the model still only accounts for 5% of the variance in the number of family violence charges. With both FVS total and gender already in the model, no other predictor used contributed significantly to improving the fit of the model.

To further investigate the discriminatory power of the FVS in terms of predicting who would be likely to commit an act of family violence, a stepwise discriminate analysis was conducted using gender, ethnicity, MAYSI AI sub-scores, and FVS totals as possible predictors, while using the total number of offenses as the predicted variable. Discriminate analysis was used to predict whether or not future family violence offenses were likely could be predicted. Again, FVS totals and gender appeared to be providing significant

information, however gender seems to contribute less to the total number of family violence charges when compared to FVS totals. The other factors did not contribute enough information to be entered into the model. Based on these findings, it appears that FVS may be a better predictor of family violence than the MAYSI AI sub-score.

### **Discussion**

This study of the FVS attempted to demonstrate the utility of the Family Violence Screener (FVS) in suggesting factors that may be associated with family violence and perhaps predicting future family violence offenses in adolescent detainees. The FVS total score was moderately correlated with the MAYSI-2 Angry/Irritable sub-scale as well as the total number of family violence offenses. The FVS did not appear to be correlated with age, ethnicity, non-violent offenses, or even violent offenses. It was surprising that the FVS did not correlate with the latter offense, thus supporting the discriminate and regression analyses, which suggested that the FVS measures a unique aspect of family violence. The data also suggested that the FVS is measuring and perhaps predicting variance that is unique from the well-established MAYSI-2 Angry/ Irritable sub-scale. The MAYSI-2 Angry/ Irritable sub-scale was moderately correlated with the FVS totals, suggesting that the two are measuring some overlapping aspects, but the FVS is capturing something else that the MAYSI-2 Angry/ Irritable sub-scale is not.

Other research has supported that psychological diagnoses and traits such as depression, suicidal thoughts, and PTSD, appear to be factors closely associated with adolescents who have been exposed to family violence (Hastings & Kelley, 1997; Schubiner, Scott, & Tzelepis, 1993; Steiner, Garcia, & Matthews, 1997). Because the MAYSI-2 Angry/ Irritable sub-scale is a proven reliable and valid measure for delinquent

adolescents, future research may want to analyze whether the Depressive and Suicidal Thoughts sub-scales are correlated with FVS totals. Perhaps more variance can be accounted for by such variables. Additionally, future research may wish to further explore externalizing in relation to internalizing behaviors, such as the SAVE (Hastings & Kelley, 1997) explored. If a child is exposed to excessive family violence and does not act out violently toward other family members, that child may act out by engaging in other high-risk behaviors such as drug abuse.

The nature of the offense was also considered to be a significant correlation with the FVS totals, however it must be considered that the large sample size ( $N=1642$ ), a correlation of .213 is not strong enough to make predictions about the nature offenses. Reliability (alpha coefficient) remained relatively consistent over the initial studies and the current research, indicating that the questions of the FVS are fairly consistent. The factor analysis from the initial studies conducted by Dr. Frey, yielded similar results as well.

Despite that factor analysis revealed one main factor, it was unclear and indeterminable what variable(s) that factor may have been capturing. Similarly, when test/re-test analyses were conducted, correlations were much lower than expected and it was unclear as to why that occurred. Based on the “management oriented approach” it may be considered that over multiple administrations of the FVS the scores would be lowered because the intervention strategies may be having a positive effect. Future research may investigate the whether or not intervention affects FVS totals in future administrations.

Participants FVS total scores appeared to be consistently inconsistent across applications. Up to four applications were analyzed, as the FVS was administered to

participants each time they were detained, thus many participants had multiple applications of the instrument. Future research may wish to explore which aspects of the FVS may be contributing to inconsistency over time. Variables such as emotionality at time of application, or other variables that could be affecting applications of the FVS, may be examined.

Future discriminate analyses may wish to categorize the FVS totals into grouped separate and distinct categories (ex. hi, medium, and low) to more accurately predict groups at risk for future family violence offenses.

In summary, the FVS appears to be a reliable measure of family violence and perhaps can be utilized in predicting family violence offenses in juvenile adolescents. The FVS may provide researchers a tool for the management oriented and prediction-oriented approaches to treatment of adolescents exposed to family violence to help prevent future family violence offenses. The FVS findings suggest that children exposed to family violence at home are more like to be angry and irritable, and are more likely to commit a family violence offense, as opposed to juveniles who are not exposed to family violence. The FVS also has advantages over other traditional methods of risk assessment in juveniles in that it is short, easy to use and read, and is easily administered. This knowledge may help immensely in the treatment and prevention of future family violence in adolescents. Other research has shown that appropriate intervention prevents the pervasive cycle of familial abuse, so perhaps the FVS can be a crucial tool for implementing intervention strategies in high-risk adolescents.

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## **VITA**

Catherine A. Bower was born in Houston, Texas, on November 12, 1968. She was adopted at birth by James and Barbara Bower. Catherine graduated third in her class with honors at Alexander Smith Academy in Houston, and then attended Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, on a diving scholarship. After one year at Furman, Catherine then transferred to Auburn University for one year, and dove there as well. After a serious back injury, she moved back to Texas and took college courses in Austin on an off until deciding to major in psychology at Texas State University-San Marcos in the summer of 2001. Catherine was reunited with her birth father and his family in the summer of 2001, and has a close relationship with them today. Catherine graduated Magna Cum Laude from Texas State University-San Marcos, in August, 2004. She then entered the Clinical Health Psychology Master's Program at Texas State University-San Marcos in the fall of 2005 and conducted her practicum at the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department during 2005 and 2006. Catherine enjoys conducting psychological research and plans on attending a PhD program in the fall of 2008.

Permanent Address: 10027 Lynbrook

Houston, TX, 77042

This thesis was typed by Catherine A. Bower