TRANSLATIONAL SCIENCE AND JUVENILE JUSTICE

A Special Issue of the Journal Translational Issues in Psychological Science (June 2019)

During the past 20 years, juvenile justice in the United States has experienced a reform toward developmentally-relevant laws and evidence-based programs. This has created a growing demand for developmentally-informed research on juvenile justice law, policy and practice.

In response to this demand, Psychology and Law research on juvenile justice issues has proliferated in recent years. In the 1990s, our Psychology and Law flagship journals and our AP-LS convention symposia only occasionally offered studies applying developmental psychological theory, research and methods to issues in juvenile justice. But lately, nearly 25% of AP-LS symposium topics have focused on children and adolescents.

When the APA journal Translational Issues in Psychological Science approached us to do a special issue on “Translational Science and Juvenile Justice,” we had many reasons to seize the opportunity. These reasons were related to both the science and the mission of TPS (the journal’s accepted acronym).

Regarding the journal, TPS is all about mentoring. The journal was developed five years ago by APAGS as a quarterly special-issue journal to encourage mentoring in the publication process. Articles must be co-authored by students or postdoctoral fellows and their faculty mentors, and each issue is edited by a senior guest editor who mentors student or postdoctoral associate editors, For the present issue, the associate editors, who were postdoctoral fellows at the time, received manuscripts, assigned them to reviewers (also students or postdocs) and, together with the mentor editor, provided feedback to authors and made publication decisions. This process was one of the rewards of taking on this assignment.

Another incentive was the challenge of using the editorial process to look at psychological research on juvenile justice through the lens of a translational research model. Medical research has been using a transitional phase (T-phase) model to conceptualize steps in the research enterprise that move from basic research to medical application in patient care—that is, “from bench-to-bedside.” Might the T-phase model be used to describe the process of Psychology and Law research in juvenile justice “from lab-to-legal system?”

In the TPS special issue, our editorial introduction offers a five-stage T-phase model (stages T-0 to T-4) that classifies psychological research on juvenile justice. T-0 refers to the basic research—developmental, clinical, cognitive, and social psychological—that describes and explains adolescent development and
behavior. T-1 employs basic research and theory to better understand delinquency, to test the effectiveness of our current juvenile justice laws and policies, and to recommend better approaches to achieve the goals of juvenile justice.

T-2 research uses T-1 evidence to develop and validate evidence-based methods designed for potential use by clinicians or juvenile justice personnel to improve policy and practice (e.g., risk assessment tools, rehabilitation methods). When T-2 research demonstrates the validity and promise of those methods, T-3 research implements them in real-world justice settings to examine their utility and degree of fidelity in actual practice. Finally, T-4 research is designed to evaluate whether those applications achieve the positive outcomes and objectives intended for youth development and public safety.

We did not apply this T-phase model in our process of reviewing and selecting articles for the TPS special issue. Nevertheless, as luck would have it, the articles that our reviewers accepted offer examples of T-1 through T-4 research in psychology and juvenile justice.

Listed below are the articles in the TPS June 2019 special issue. We very much appreciate the efforts of these students, postdocs, and their mentors in making this significant contribution to translational research in Psychology and Law.

T-1

Woestehoff, S. A., Redlich, A. D., Cathcart, E. J., & Quas, J. A. Legal professionals’ perceptions of juvenile engagement in the plea process.

T-2


Williams, M., Rogers, R., & Hartigan, S. E. Dimensions of psychopathology and behavioral problems: A CFA study of the MAYS1-2 scales in legally involved juveniles.


T-3

Goldstein, N. E. S., Gale-Bentz, E., McPhee, J., NeMoyer, A., Walker, S., Bishop, S., . . . Schwartz, R. G. Applying the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges’ resolution to juvenile probation reform

Mikytuck, A., Woolard, J., & Umpierre, M. Improving engagement, empowerment, and support in juvenile corrections through research

De Beuf, T. L. F., de Vogel, V., & de Ruiter, C. Implementing the START:AV in a Dutch residential youth facility: Outcomes of success

T-4