From: Hamilton, Zachary K [mailto:zachary.hamilton@wsu.edu]
Sent: Thursday, July 14, 2016 5:34 PM
To: Koebernick, Doug
Cc: Carbaugh, Abby L
Subject: RE: STRONG-R

Mr. Koebernick,

Thank you for your interest in the STRONG-R. Attached please find our recent publication, describing the development and validation of the STRONG-R in Washington State. I am also attaching a version of a white paper that is set to be published later this year.

While it is true that the STORNG-R has not been validated for the NDCS population (yet), that would also be the case for the YLS/CMI as well. The issue you have raised is a common one. The YLS/CMI and its previous versions (the LSI and the LSI-R) have been used for many years and repeatedly validated with multiple studies and in multiple locations. That surely gives people a sense of security and stability. However, I (and other assessment creators) would argue that duration use does not equate to performance.

The attached documents outlines why there is more to the argument than simply indicating that an instrument is "valid". In fact, the criteria to create a "valid" prediction tool are easily achieved. The primary criterion for creating a validated tool is simply to improve the prediction of recidivism beyond random chance (i.e. a coin flip). As descried in the publication, a "valid" tool can be created with a single item (i.e. and offender's age). Instead, industry standards have outlined that the strength of predictive validity is most important. That is, one should not simply be concerned that the tool improves beyond random chance but that its prediction is more accurate than any other tool under consideration. Again, I cannot argue that the YLS/CMI has been identified to provide a better prediction than random chance in more places than any other tool. However, we attempted to create the STRONG-R to be more accurate that the YLS/CMI and to customize the prediction for the specific population it is being used to assess.

As is discussed in the attached article, the YLS/CMI was developed for a Canadian probation population. The original tool was built in the early 90s and there have been very few scoring modifications to the tool since its initial development. Since that time, research, better item development, and advanced statistical modeling techniques have vastly improved the accuracy of risk assessment tool construction.

The STRONG-R makes use of these advances and we contend, when attempting to predict recidivism, that it is more accurate than the YLS/CMI.

Furthermore, the STRONG-R is designed to be tailored for each jurisdiction in which it is implemented. That is, while developed on a large Washington State sample (N~44,000), Nebraska's population is different in many ways. There are varying offense prevalence, different rates of violence, differing demographics, etc. Each one of these distinctions influences the accuracy of the prediction model. The STRONG-R is designed to use the implementing jurisdictions available data and match the study population to an existing pool of data collected in Washington and other jurisdictions. The tool is then altered, selecting and reweighting response items, to most closely approximate the implementing jurisdiction's population (in your case NDCS). In the following years, data will be collected with the implemented tool, evaluated, and validated using the NDCS population. At this time additional modifications may be made, redesigning the tool's items and weights to provide even greater accuracy of the tool and further tailoring it to the population.

Furthermore, the STRONG-R provides separate models to not only predict recidivism generally but to also provide users with a prediction of an offender's likelihood to commit violent, property and drug offending. Additional specifications are used to identify distinctions between male and female populations, increasing the gender sensitivity of the tool.

Unfortunately, YLS/CMI does not make these efforts. It provides the same, general recidivism prediction model with the same items and scores regardless of location. It provides this assessment rather expensively, charging users a flat fee per assessment completed. While the YLS/CMI has been validated in many places (often with small to moderate prediction improvements over random chance), their assessment can make no claim of local validition with the NDCS population and would only be able to do so if implemented and evaluated using the same two year evaluation period that will be used for the STRONG-R.

I am sorry for the long email and I hope that the information I have provided answers your questions. However, if you would like to speak over the phone, sometimes it is easier to clear up some of the technical discussion. Just let me know. I would also recommend that you speak with Abby Carbaugh and others at the NDCS. I believe she has a greater level of detail regarding the decision making that went into the competitive RFP process.

One last thing, I'm guessing you found my email by searching my name (which is completely fine and understandable). However, as a state employee it is preferred if communications regarding my consulting work not use Washington State resources. In the future please use my alternate email address (zach.hamilton.consulting@gmail.com).

Thank you again for your interest in the STORNG-R and please let me know if I can be of further help.

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From: Doug Koebernick [mailto:dkoebernick@leg.ne.gov]
Sent: Thursday, July 14, 2016 2:29 PM
To: Hamilton, Zachary K <zachary.hamilton@wsu.edu>
Subject: STRONG-R

Dr. Hamilton,

My name is Doug Koebernick and I work for the Inspector General of Corrections for the Nebraska Legislature. An issue that has risen up in Nebraska recently (and that you are likely aware of) is the selection and use of the STRONG-R by the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services. I've had many people who have communicated to me that they believe the STRONG-R is not a validated tool and that they don't understand why the Department didn't select the YLS/CMI.

This is probably a bit unusual but since you are so intimately involved with the STRONG-R, would you be willing to lay out the strengths of the STRONG-R for me? I would like to become more educated on the tool and am hoping that you may have some documents or other information that would assist me in doing that.

Thanks so much for your time.

Doug Koebernick

Inspector General of Corrections