Test Use in Forensic Evaluations

Heilbrun's Guidelines

- Heilbrun, K. (1992) The role of psychological testing in forensic assessment. *Law and Human Behavior, 16*,257-272.
- Provides discussion of things for MH practitioners to consider when using tests in forensic evaluations.
- A bit dated, but still very relevant.

Test Use Guidelines

- *(1) The test is commercially available and adequately documented in two sources.*
  - *First, it is accompanied by a manual describing its development, psychometric properties, and procedure for administration.*
  - *Second, it is listed and reviewed in Mental Measurements Yearbook or some other readily available source.*

- *(2) Reliability should be considered. The use of tests with a reliability coefficient of less than .80 is not advisable. The use of less reliable tests would require an explicit justification by the psychologist.*

Heilbrun's Guidelines

- *(3) The test should be relevant to the legal issue, or to a psychological construct underlying the legal issue. Whenever possible, this relevance should be supported by the availability of validation research published in refereed journals.*

- *(4) Standard administration should be used, with testing conditions as close as possible to the quiet, distraction-free ideal.*

Heilbrun's Guidelines

- *(5) Applicability to this population and for this purpose should guide both test selection and interpretation. The results of a test (distinct from behavior observed during testing) should not be applied toward a purpose for which the test was not developed (e.g., inferring psychopathology from the results of an intelligence test). Population and situation specificity should guide interpretation. The closer the "fit" between a given individual and the population and situation of those in the validation research, the more confidence can be expressed in the applicability of the results.*

Heilbrun's Guidelines

- *(6) Objective tests and actuarial data combination are preferable when there are appropriate outcome data and a "'formula" exists.*

- *(7) Response style should be explicitly assessed using approaches sensitive to distortion, and the results of psychological testing interpreted within the context of the individual's response style. When response style appears to be malingering, defensive, or irrelevant rather than honest/reliable, the results of psychological testing may need to be discounted or even ignored and other data sources emphasized to a greater degree.*

Test Selection

- Comes down to this:
  - It is the practitioner's responsibility to conduct appropriate interviews, select appropriate tests, use those tests properly, base any conclusions made on the data collected during the evaluation, and to specify the degree of certainty one has in regard to the conclusions made.
  - When in doubt – get a consultation!
  - Anytime results sound like they aren't based on sound reasoning, are an overstatement, or are not supported by data – question those results & get a consultation!

Questions/Discussion

- Issues unclear from what we've presented?
- Issues that have come up in prior cases?
- Issues that you've wondered about regarding mental health evaluations?
- Any other thoughts/ideas to share?