

Brief Report:

Reliability of the Jesness Inventory

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The Jesness Inventory (JI; Jesness, 1972) was developed primarily for use in the psychological assessment of juvenile delinquents. It consists of 10 scales designed to measure various personality characteristics and an Asocial Index used in the prediction of delinquency, the latter being derived from a discriminant function analysis of the JI scales. Despite extensive use, there has been little independent assessment of the JI reliability. Corrected split-half reliabilities based on 1,862 delinquent and nondelinquent boys and test-retest correlations over an 8-month period for 131 delinquents are presented in the JI manual; the only result given for the Asocial Index, however, is a test-retest coefficient over a 1-day period for 57 delinquents under conditions encouraging fake good responses. The only other published assessment of scale reliabilities has been by Shark and Handal (1977), who reported test-retest reliabilities similar in magnitude to those presented by Jesness for 62 delinquent and nondelinquent subjects. The present study examines the current reliability of the JI with South Australian delinquents.

Method

Subjects ($n = 467$) were all male delinquents, 13 to 17 years of age, who had completed the JI and whose files were held at Glandore Psychological Services, Department for Community Welfare, South Australia. They were tested in a variety of situations, e.g., as part of institutional admission procedures, court assessments, and psychological assessments for welfare workers. Testing was conducted in both individual and group settings. Split-half reliabilities (corrected for scale length) and alpha coefficients were subsequently calculated for each scale.

Due to the manner in which the Asocial Index was constructed, its reliability is appropriately estimated by test-retest. Results were available for 54 male probationers, 13 to 18 years of age, attending part-time Youth Project Centre programs (2- to 3- month retest interval) and for 29 students, 14 to 15 years of age, attending an Adelaide metropolitan high school (2- week retest interval).

Results and Discussion

Table 1 compares Jesness's results with the more recent South Australian findings, showing that there has been little attenuation in reliability, despite differences in time and cultural setting. Nonetheless, the reliability of some scales was lower than desirable, and three scales had a fair proportion of negative item-total correlations (Social Maladjustment, Autism, Withdrawal).

Jesness (1972) reported a test-retest correlation of .64 ($n = 57$, 1 day) for the Asocial Index, and Shark and Handal (1977) found a test-retest coefficient of .65 ($n = 62$, 1 week). A similar value ($r = .64$, $n = 29$, 2 weeks) was determined in the present study for the high school students. However, the

Table 1
 Jesness Inventory Scale Reliabilities for California
 (Jesness, 1972) and South Australian Samples

Scale	California Sample (<i>n</i> =1,862) Odd-Even Reliability	South Australian Sample (<i>n</i> =467)		
		Split-Half Reliability	Alpha Coefficient	Percentage of Negative Item-Total Correlations
Social Maladjustment	.84	.64	.72	23.8
Value Orientation	.88	.83	.84	0.0
Immaturity	.63	.47	.54	6.7
Autism	.72	.66	.67	14.3
Alienation	.83	.77	.78	3.8
Manifest Agression	.83	.80	.80	3.2
Withdrawal	.62	.64	.56	25.0
Social Anxiety	.65	.68	.64	8.3
Repression	.64	.56	.57	0.0
Denial	.70	.76	.76	5.0

Youth Project Centre probationers ($n = 54$, 2 to 3 months), with a longer retest interval, obtained a test-retest coefficient of .26, a figure which raises doubts about use of the Index in predicting future behavior within the delinquent group. Such doubts were supported by an examination of the relationship between Asocial Index scores and recidivism (judged by subsequent court convictions) for 91 probationers attending Youth Project Centre programs, 88 of whom completed the JI prior to entering the group program and 57 of whom completed the JI after discharge. No significant differences were found between recidivists and nonrecidivists on either preprogram ($t = .524$, $df = 86$) or postprogram ($t = .464$, $df = 55$) scores at the end of a 12-month follow-up period. Contrary to Jesness's (1977) assertion "that the ability of the JI to predict future delinquency has not as yet been tested" (p. 697), similar results to those obtained here have been reported in studies with British delinquents by Martin and Clarke (1969) and Saunders and Davies (1976) and with Australian delinquents by Ogden (1973). It is likely that the Index's poor stability over an extended period of time is an important factor in its observed failure as a predictive instrument within delinquent samples. Another difficulty lies in the absence of adequate validation in the original construction of the Index. The Asocial Index was originally validated against the criterion of discriminating between youths of known delinquency status at one point in time. However, as a predictive measure, adequate validation can only be obtained by examining which subjects ultimately offend again.

It is possible that delinquency proneness is such a changeable state that reliable predictive indices will never be attained; but if the attempt were to be made, it would only be achieved through studies using a longitudinal research design. Some of the JI scales appear to display adequate reliability, though further research examining their validity is needed.

References

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