

SASSI Identifies Substance Use Disorder in Young Offender

The profile is of a 23-year-old male whom we will call "Ben." Ben was in his 4th week of detention at a local midwestern jail. He was arrested after turning himself in for a prior domestic violence offence committed while under the influence of alcohol and for which he had fled the state. Ben had one prior arrest for receiving stolen property which he had subsequently traded for drugs. The treatment provider conducting the assessment had been meeting with him at the jail for several weeks. The court was particularly interested in determining the level of risk that Ben would again flee the area.

When examining a SASSI profile, it is important to begin by looking at the most basic data-random responding, decision rule results, and defensiveness. Notice that Ben seemed to respond to the SASSI items in a meaningful manner (RAP=0) and that there is no test evidence of defensive responding (DEF=4). The results of the decision rules indicate that he is likely to have a moderate to severe substance use disorder.

Ben acknowledges extensive and severe alcohol and drug problems (FVA=23 and FVOD=29). Although he claimed to have been abstinent during several weeks prior to incarceration, his substance use history likely includes substantial substance-related problems including loss of control, negative consequences, and social functioning.

There is significant evidence that Ben's life experiences include living in social environments where the abuse of alcohol and other drugs and associated consequences is a relatively common and routine occurrence (SYM=8). Despite Ben's awareness of behavioral problems related to his drinking and drugging, the normalization of such problems in the milieu in which he lives may make it difficult for him to fully accept the severity of his addiction.

In addition, Ben's responses are remarkably similar to substance dependent individuals who often lack awareness and insight regarding the impact of alcohol and drug use on their psychological and emotional functioning (SAT=5). He may be unaware of related symptoms such as emotional avoidance, fear of intimacy, and obsession with maintaining personal power and control. In spite of these limitations, Ben does seem to acknowledge some awareness of possessing behavioral characteristics and traits commonly associated with individuals who have substance use disorders (OAT=7). These may include such things as low frustration tolerance, impulsivity, self-centeredness, and irritability.

While there may be some moderate risk of ongoing legal problems (COR=9), Ben's score is well below the cutting point. Therefore, it would be prudent to recognize the limitations of the COR scale, especially when making case disposition decisions.

Treatment Recommendations:

This case presents us with a good example of the value of early identification of substance dependency problems in criminal justice settings. Ben's SASSI results clearly demonstrate a well-established pattern of substance dependency that will require relatively intensive intervention. Therefore, he may be a solid candidate for diversion into an alcohol and drug treatment program as a way of reducing the risk of future offenses.

Treatment planning should include interventions designed to build upon Ben's willingness to be open about his alcohol and drug problems. Efforts to increase his self-awareness and insight regarding the pervasive nature of substance use in his life would be valuable. Cognitive approaches may be beneficial in helping Ben to reframe his view of the social environment in which he lives. Community self-help groups and therapeutic group modalities may be particularly helpful in providing an environment that encourages abstinence and in establishing new social support networks.

The recommended level of care should include adequate supervisory support and structure to ensure successful completion of treatment and transition into aftercare. Random toxicological screens, cognitively based behavior management strategies, and possible use of transitional living arrangements may be of benefit. In addition, anger management and impulse control issues should be addressed to reduce the risk of continued domestic violence.

Name Ben Gender M Age 23

Case Number _____ Test date _____

Adult Male Profile								
Face Valid Alcohol	Face Valid Other Drugs	Symptoms	Obvious Attributes	Subtle Attributes	Defensiveness	Supplemental Addiction Measure	Family vs. Controls	Correctional
FVA	FVOD	SYM	OAT	SAT	DEF	SAM	FAM	COR
Scores → 22	29	8	7	5	4	9	8	9

THE DECISION RULE:

1. ANY rule answered "yes"?



HIGH PROBABILITY
of moderate to severe Substance Use Disorder

2. ALL rules answered "no"?



LOW PROBABILITY
of moderate to severe Substance Use Disorder

Mild Substance Use Disorder Guideline

Check if any are "yes"? FVA 9 or more ___ FVOD 9 or more ___ SYM 6 or more ___
OAT 8 or more ___ SAT 5 or more ___

Further evaluation is suggested if any are checked "yes."

Check if DEF is 8 or more ___. Elevated DEF scores increase the possibility of the SASSI missing individuals with a substance use disorder. Elevated DEF may also reflect situational factors.

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