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Renewed risk assessment Ritax 2.0 Summary

Evaluation of implementation and use by Child
Protection Council and Juvenile Probation Department

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Introduction

In the juvenile justice system, the National set of Instruments Juvenile Justice System (in Dutch: LIJ) supports the chain partners in collecting and analysing information about young people and their living environment. Using the instruments in the LIJ, the chain partners get and give each other insight into what is needed to prevent recidivism. The goal of the LIJ is to lead young offenders to appropriate interventions. Part of the LIJ is the Ritax risk assessment instrument. The Ritax identifies the risk and protective factors of juvenile suspects, which are known from scientific research to increase or decrease the likelihood of repetition of criminal behaviour. The information collected with the Ritax provides insight into which domains are most at risk. Based on these risk scores, the LIJ provides automated suggestions for appropriate behavioural interventions. Therefore, in principle, the LIJ's suggestions always match the young people's recidivism risk and risk profile. Thus, young people can be directed to the appropriate interventions that address these risk factors.

The procedure is as follows.

- ① Before the Child Protection Council conducts the Ritax, the police complete another instrument in the LIJ: the Preselect Recidivism. From this instrument, the juvenile's overall recidivism risk (in Dutch: the ARR) follows.
- ② Then, during a criminal investigation, the Ritax is conducted by the Child Protection Council (RvdK) to provide criminal advice. The Ritax consists of two parts: the Ritax A and Ritax B. These two parts consist of items in the same domains, with the Ritax B being an extension of the Ritax A. The Ritax A is for: young people with a medium or high general recidivism risk on the Preselect Recidivism completed by the police, for young people suspected of committing a serious offence, at the request of the public prosecutor or for young people in custody.
- ③ The outcome of the Ritax A is a dynamic risk profile (DRP). If the DRP is medium, high or very high, or a custody order is involved, the RvdK will conduct the Ritax B. If a young person reoffends and a Ritax B was conducted in a previous criminal investigation, the RvdK will conduct a Ritax B again.
- ④ Referral to the juvenile probation department is done based on the Ritax B. The juvenile probation department updates the Ritax B conducted by the RvdK to create their action plan. They cannot create a Ritax B themselves in the LIJ. For the evaluation of the action plan, they take the Ritax B, update it or conduct it again.

The Ritax was revised and improved in 2021 based on a Dutch standardization study by Van der Put et al (2021). The updated Ritax - Ritax 2.0 - was put into use in February 2022 by council investigators of the RvdK and juvenile probation officers of the Certified Institutions (in Dutch: GI's). The Ministry of Justice and Security (JenV) wanted a process evaluation of the implementation to identify any bottlenecks and problems. The opinion of Ritax users was important in this regard. Based on the process evaluation, the Ministry of JenV intends to improve the use of the Ritax if necessary (Min JenV, 2022c).

Commissioned by the Scientific Research and Documentation Centre (in Dutch: WODC) of the Ministry of JenV, DSP-groep evaluated between 1 July 2022 and 1 July 2023 how the implementation went and what bottlenecks were experienced. DSP-groep also mapped users' experiences, how users rated the revised Ritax in general, and specifically when using it among young people aged 18-23.

Research questions and design

The study answered the following questions:

1. How did the implementation of the Ritax 2.0 go?
2. Are there any errors, ambiguities or bottlenecks in the Ritax 2.0 that users of the tool have encountered?
3. To what extent is the Ritax 2.0 being used differently than the old version?
4. How do users of the LIJ (RvdK, youth probation) evaluate the adjustments in the Ritax 2.0? To what extent are users satisfied with the adjustments?
5. What are the experiences in the use of the Ritax 2.0 among young people between 18 and 23 years of age?
6. What adjustments can be recommended to solve any identified bottlenecks and problems?

Several research methods were used to answer the research questions:

- ① Desk research on available written documentation (manual LIJ and Ritax, internal memos and handouts) and a webinar on the Ritax 2.0.
- ① Interview with the Chain Management Department of the Ministry of JenV and the Directorate of Youth, Family and Approach to Crime Phenomena, interview with researcher who conducted the standardization study and contact person Youth Care (Jeugdzorg Nederland) for the LIJ.
- ① (Group) interviews with twelve superusers of the RvdK and five superusers of the juvenile probation department.
- ① Digital questionnaires from thirty-six RvdK employees and twelve employees of the youth probation organization.
- ① Two group interviews with thirteen RvdK employees (council investigators and behavioural specialist) and two group interviews with fourteen youth probation employees (juvenile probation staff, behavioural expert and team leader) in two regions.
- ① Analysis of registration data of the RvdK of 7,748 taken Ritax 1.0 in 2021 and 6,821 Ritax 2.0 in 2022 after implementation Ritax 2.0.

Results

How did the implementation of the Ritax 2.0 go?

We looked at the course of the four phases of implementation: dissemination, adoption, implementation and assurance. Our research showed that the Ritax users were well informed in the dissemination phase, both at the RvdK and at the juvenile probation department. The implementation of the Ritax 2.0 was prepared on a

cross-country basis by a core team and a working group. Superusers have been appointed in each region of the RvdK and the GI's. These superusers are experienced users of the LIJ and Ritax who periodically meet nationally. The superusers of the RvdK and the GI's have been well included in this process. Some superusers have tested the new version of the Ritax. The council investigators and youth probation officers have been informed in detail through various channels. Much attention was paid in advance to the implementation of the Ritax 2.0. This helped ensure a smooth transition from the Ritax 1.0 to 2.0.

In the adoption phase, it is important that professionals develop a positive attitude toward using the new tool. We conclude that the users at the RvdK and youth probation expected little difference from Ritax 2.0 compared to Ritax 1.0. They did not see Ritax 2.0 as much of an innovation and therefore had few expectations. From a policy and scientific perspective, the Dutch standards on which Ritax 2.0 is based are a major innovation from the American standards on which Ritax 1.0 is based. In practice, however, professionals notice little of this. The professionals did have expectations of the adjustments to the LIJ application. The system modifications should make the use of LIJ more user-friendly.

In the implementation phase the Ritax 2.0 was actually put into use. The superusers played the role of early adopters and had a stimulating role in the implementation. It should be noted, however, that due to staffing problems (changes, leave and absenteeism), a superuser was not available in all regions at the time of implementation in recent years. Another factor at the GI's was that juvenile probation received less attention due to the problems in youth protection. Youth probation is also much smaller in terms of production volume than youth protection measures. Based on the research, we conclude that the capacity problems at RvdK and GI's and the less attention in some regions for juvenile probation are the main influencing factors for less use of the Ritax.

In the assurance phase, users integrate the Ritax 2.0 into their practices. Since its implementation, Ritax 2.0 has been used as prescribed. At the RvdK, Ritax is part of the work process. There are differences between regions in the extent to which Ritax is used. The probation department also uses Ritax 2.0. However, not all regions use Ritax to the same extent. There are also differences in the extent to which Ritax is integrated into the work process of the juvenile probation.

Errors, ambiguities and bottlenecks in the use of Ritax 2.0

In general, users of the Ritax at the RvdK and youth probation are satisfied with the Ritax. The Ritax is helpful in preparing the sentencing advice and for the juvenile probation in preparing the action plan and the evaluation of the action plan. Bottlenecks experienced are mainly related to problems with the system: for the RvdK the reporting format and for the juvenile probation the link between the registration system of the GI's (Wijz) and the LIJ.

We further conclude that, despite the fact that the Ritax has been shortened, it remains a bulky instrument of over 100 items. Some council workers and juvenile probation officers do not find this a problem, others still

find it a lot of questions to discuss in one conversation. The extent to which users take the Ritax more or less frequently plays a role in the extent to which they experience problems gathering the information for and reviewing the items in the Ritax. Some council investigators and juvenile probation officers conduct occasional criminal investigations or juvenile probation orders and therefore experience more problems with gathering information than their colleagues who use the Ritax more frequently.

Use and assessment of the Ritax 2.0

Based on the changes made to the updated Ritax, the Ministry of JenV expects that the influx of cases to a more extensive criminal investigation by the RvdK will be higher, i.e. more Ritax B will be conducted and therefore more young people will be directed to behavioural intervention. The ministry also expects that the upgraded Ritax will be more user-friendly and that fewer items will be entered as unknown.

Nationally, the Ritax 2.0 is conducted more often by the RvdK than the Ritax 1.0. Ritax B is also conducted more frequently in most regions. There are differences between regions. Several factors play a role in these differences between the regions: reduced intake of cases, capacity problems and staff turnover, seriousness of the offenses and risk factors among the juveniles intake. In addition, the renewal of the Ritax has been seized upon to highlight and encourage the use of the Ritax. Therefore, it is not possible to conclude that the proportionately higher conductance of Ritax is due to the renewed Ritax 2.0.

In juvenile probation, there are no figures available nationally that can be interpreted unambiguously regarding the extent to which Ritax is conducted. The interviews revealed differences between regions and also within regions in the extent to which Ritax B of the RvdK is updated and re-conducted for the interim and final evaluations of the plan of action. Again, similar factors to the RvdK play a role here: staff turnover and capacity, experience with taking Ritax, recidivism. In addition, there is a distinction between the extent to which the GI's paid attention to conducting the Ritax and encouraged it. Capacity, but also the extent to which there is or was specific attention to juvenile probation play a role here. Finally, the extent to which working according to the principles of the Risk Need Responsivity (RNR) model is secured in the primary work process also plays a role.

The number of items entered as unknown at the RvdK is lower in Ritax 2.0 than in Ritax 1.0. But large differences between regions remain. Especially items about static risk factors in the family are entered as unknown. The main reason why items are scored as unknown is that juveniles or parents do not provide this information. Denying suspects also lack information to score items. The juvenile probation department names similar items that are often scored as unknown. In the case of the juvenile justice system, it also plays a role at which stage of the juvenile justice process it receives the assignment. When pre-trial detention is suspended, the main focus is on drawing up the suspensory conditions. Less attention is then paid to asking for information about the parents. Also, more sensitive topics about vulnerable periods in the juvenile's life only come up at a later stage in counselling and not in the initial interview.

Although there are still bottlenecks in the use of the Ritax, most respondents are satisfied with the Ritax 2.0 and the adjustments made. Especially the transition to the five-point scale for monitoring the plan of action and the merging of the domain of work with day care and leisure are evaluated positively. Also the adjustments in the application, as a result of which it is now easy to navigate between the Ritax and the report are viewed positively by the RvdK. In juvenile probation, the action plan is made in the GI's own system. Bottlenecks are experienced with the link between Wijz and the LIJ. It is not clear whether this is due to IFM or the local system.

In general, both the RvdK and the juvenile probation department find the Ritax 2.0 (and especially the application in the LIJ) more user-friendly than the Ritax 1.0. The display and classification of the risk factors are perceived as more clear.

Use of the Ritax with young adults in the context of adolescent criminal justice (ASR)

In the GI's that participated in this study, there is still little experience with the use of the Ritax with young adults between the ages of 18 and 23 (in Dutch: ASR cases). In addition to there being relatively few ASR cases, not all juvenile probation staff are aware that they have to create their own Ritax B for juveniles over 18. This is because there is no Ritax from the RvdK available then. It is also possible in ASR cases that the adult probation department is involved and not the juvenile probation department. The William Schrikker Foundation has the most experience with ASR. We cannot draw a conclusion about the use of the Ritax in ASR cases based on this study.

Overall conclusion

We conclude that in general the transition from Ritax 1.0 to Ritax 2.0 went smoothly. It is important to note that the users of Ritax at the RvdK and youth probation office did not experience the transition as such a major change in the sense that, according to them, there were substantial adjustments. The Ritax 2.0 is experienced as user-friendly and the transition to a five-point scale has added value. Bottlenecks are mainly related to (local) ICT problems, capacity problems and not having the correct information to assess certain items. The expectations of the Ministry of JenV have partly come true but cannot be attributed solely to the Ritax 2.0.

Limitations of the study

The intention was to conduct the process evaluation shortly after the implementation of Ritax 2.0, so bottlenecks could be addressed quickly. When carrying out the fieldwork we ran into delays for various reasons, so there was still a relatively long time between the implementation of the Ritax 2.0 and the process evaluation. As a result, not all respondents had a clear recollection of what information they received prior to the implementation. However, none of the respondents mentioned major bottlenecks in the transition from Ritax 1.0 to 2.0. We also noted that the implementation of the Ritax 2.0 was not perceived as a major change or innovation. For this reason, the analysis framework was not always entirely appropriate as it assumes the

implementation of a new intervention. In this study, we have therefore mainly focused on the current use of the Ritax and the bottlenecks experienced in doing so.

The original goal was to have a nationwide picture of Ritax use in all regions. As for the RvdK, we do have national figures on the use of the Ritax and collected qualitative information in half of the regions through interviews and a questionnaire. However, the response rate to the questionnaire was low. In our opinion, the large workload and the experience that Ritax 2.0 is not such a major innovation will have played a role in this. While we do not have a nationwide picture, the interviews and the questionnaire in the regions where we do have information revealed the same bottlenecks and factors that influence the use of the Ritax. We expect these to apply more broadly nationwide as well.

The results on the implementation and use of the Ritax by juvenile probation officers are based on qualitative interviews in a limited number of regions. Again, we extracted similar information on determinants of Ritax use. Unfortunately, we cannot substantiate the findings with respect to the juvenile probation department with national figures because these are not available.

Reflection and recommendations

The results of this study do not cover the whole country, but we have retrieved comparable factors from the results that provide clues for using the Ritax. We therefore believe that we have sufficient basis for the following reflection and recommendations:

- ① The Ritax 2.0 remains a bulky instrument, and some mainly static family factors are still relatively often scored as unknown. It is advisable to check whether the instrument can be further shortened by looking in particular at dynamic risk factors that interventions can change.. It is also advisable to investigate whether a distinction between *unknown* and *do not want to give information* makes a difference to the risk profile.
- ① Attention to the (timely) completion of the Ritax and keeping appointments, even when there are capacity issues and work pressures, is important. The Ritax is an important tool for identifying risk factors and directing young people to interventions. Good knowledge of the underlying RNR model and attention to dealing with outcomes of the Ritax in case discussions and team meetings are important for this. The Ritax is not a goal, but a substantive means to properly guide young people to an appropriate approach.
- ① It is important that the RvdK and juvenile probation department, after collecting or updating the Ritax, release it into the LIJ in a timely manner, so that chain partners can use the conducted Ritax in time and build on the information that has already been collected. This is necessary to achieve the LIJ's goal to support information transfer in the juvenile justice chain.

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