



Report

Risk and Needs Assessment Workshop

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Day 1

Introduction

Hans Meurisse, Director General, Belgian Prison Service

Kirsten Hawlitschek, Executive Director EuroPris

Risk assessment – Why, how often, reliability, quality standards, pros and cons

Standards and Guidance for Risk Assessment

Professor Hazel Kemshall, De Montfort University, Leicester, UK

The Scottish example of how to organise risk assessment is rather different from the one in England and Wales, where development has been made by the Ministry of justice, ie a more politicised process. In England and Wales the expert group has been closed, with the risk of being affected by politicians and/or media. In Scotland they have created an independent body for development of tools and guidelines. The mission of the Risk Management Authority (RMA) is threefold, to:

- Formulate principles and policies
- Create standards and guidelines for practice
- Rate tools and keep a research directory

Assessment should be made with a purpose, for example planning of interventions and risk management. This calls for standards of good risk assessment. Importing instruments from abroad is not good enough. When it comes to preventive sentencing courts demand accredited risk assessments and that includes accreditation of the assessors (staff performing the assessments).

The approach was from the beginning a rights based approach, safeguarding the rights of the offender, compared with England and Wales where the risk orientation discourse is dominating.

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Q&A

Q: Your mission is to guarantee independence and quality in instruments as well as in assessors. Do the assessors have the competence and the time to make good assessments?

A: Since the year 2000 we have had budget cuts that make it increasingly harsh to maintain standards. Today we have to prioritize those who are close to release, which of course abrogates the rights and opportunities for those earlier in their careers.

Q: You say that you have a rights based approach in risk assessment. Can you mention some cases or data that supports that your approach is accurate?

A: Well, the assessors might take the stand in court defending their assessments, at least in pre-trial court decisions. And when it comes to labelling we have a case in Northern Ireland where an inmate was labelled “very high risk” for imminent serious violence. The judge discarded the label and this forced the agency to redefine its definitions and make them more precise in time and type of risk.

Why we need to abolish labelling

Dominik Lehner, Head Risk Assessment, Swiss Prison Service

Risk assessment is a very common activity in correctional settings. Nonetheless there is little exchange of knowledge and practice about risk assessment. Forensic psychiatry has much better infrastructure for networking. This event is supposed to increase networking in the correctional field.

Why is best practice in risk assessment so important? In Switzerland 50 % of the sentences are indefinite. That means that risk assessments to a high degree affects both the rights of the individual offender as well as prison numbers at large.

Best practice in the field is equally important from the rehabilitation and security perspectives. We need to distinguish between offenders’ risk of reoffending and institutional security risks (while in prison). Education of prison staff should focus on how offender risk assessment is done when using best practice methods and more important, how it is done in your penitentiary system.

Best practice offender risk assessment:

- is accomplished by a structured process as early as possible
- is renewed regularly
- does not use uncertain grades of labeling like «dangerous» or «extremely dangerous»
- does not restrict to common scales like «low», «moderate» or «high» to classify risk in general without further clarification
- recognizes the offender’s needs and their significance to the risk factors
- recognizes the offenders skills and their significance to the risk factors
- points out individual risk factors and optionally how these can be dealt with
- is based on the offenders complete case dossier (prosecution, sentence, prison reports, psychological/psychiatric expert reports)
- uses expertise forensic psychiatric and psychological data including clinical expertise (anamnesis and psychic exploration and application of assessment tools)
- is done by the method of structured professional judgement

Performing risk assessment there is a need to separate predictive statements from normative ones. “The doctors cannot do the judges job”, so to speak. This has been emphasized in Switzerland because of the increasing use of *Risk Oriented Sanctioning* (ROS). It also needs to be done with an interdisciplinary approach.

The Swiss system for forensic risk assessment contains two different models:

1. *General risk assessment*. Starting at admission in a penitentiary institution *after* conviction. Automatic screening tool classify offenders into (1) regular treatment, (2) in depth case report by penitentiary office or (3) outsourced expert assessment.
2. *Serious crimes*. Risk assessment performed by an expert committee using interdisciplinary structured professional judgement in the sense of a peer review. Satellite view.

It is important to state that the use of assessment tools are not risk assessment, it is a much wider concept. It is behaviour that is dangerous and not the person in itself. Knowledge about risk factors and how to handle them is the basis for risk assessment and risk management. We need to abolish labelling and make qualitative assessment of risk of what, in what situations and to whom.

There is now a handbook and guidelines for Prison and Probation Services regarding radicalisation and violent extremism provided by the Council of Europe. It has good advice on risk assessment. Maybe someday there will be a separate CoE recommendation on risk assessment in general. There seem to be a need for that kind of policy development.

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Q&A

Q: You say that this model accounts for about 1/3 of Switzerland. What about the rest?

A: There are similar systems in some regions, but not in all of them.

Q: Is there any follow up on the committee recommendations?

A: Not any structured follow up, but authorities normally follow our recommendations.

Q: You say that 50 % of the offender population is on some kind of preventive detention. How is it possible to maintain definitions in a system where so many people are locked up indefinitely?

A: There will be a presentation later on that will address that issue.

Q: Filtering/screening. What about the false negatives? Normally, politicians do not understand the concept of risk and screening for risk.

A: We use the general screening for sentences longer than 6 months. It is a matter of scale and we choose not to screen all short time offenders.

How is risk assessment organized in Prison Services?

The risk assessment process in the Belgian Prison Service

Astrid Boelaert, Senior Psychologist Central Psychosocial Service

Risk assessment in the Belgian Prison Service is performed by the Psychosocial Service (PSS), an internal body organised at local, regional and national level. The mission is to:

Guide prisoners through their detention in view of their psychosocial reintegration

Cooperate on a safe and humane detention

From a scientific point of view, give advice with respect to conditional release (and other modes of the execution of sanctions)

Since the Dutroux case a couple of years ago there has been significant changes in conditional release. Those serving less than 3 years are released after 2/3. Offenders with longer sentences will be reviewed by a special court.

Risk assessment is performed to handle internal and external risks. Risk assessment is seen as both a product (an assessment of risk factors) and a process (ending up in a reintegration plan). There are explicit criteria for whom to assess and for what purpose.

The PSS use a standard risk assessment tool based on Andrews and Bonta's Central Eight:

Major risk domains

1. History of Antisocial Behavior
2. Antisocial Personality Pattern
3. Antisocial Cognition
4. Antisocial Associates

Minor risk domains

1. Family / Marital Circumstances
2. School / Work
3. Leisure / Recreation
4. Substance abuse

In certain cases (terrorism, sex offenses) more in-depth assessments are made, using actuarial tools as Static-99, VRAG etc. and structured professional judgement supported by HCR-20, SAPROF etc.

The PSS use a consensus model to agree on a professional judgement. This leads to better predictions and precautions. They also take the time at risk into consideration. Judgement might be different between a 24 hour leave and conditional release.

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Q&A

Q: This is a heavily RNR (risk, need, responsivity) based model. The seriousness of the index crime is a bad predictor for recidivism, i.e. the time of the sentence should not be relevant. Despite that, you choose to put more resources into those with longer sentences.

A: This is a political and administrative decision, where sentence length is one of the criteria.

Q: Are Foreign National Prisoners excluded from these assessments?

A: Yes, because of the lack of information. It makes it hard to make an assessment.

Q: In general, do you have the information you need to make good assessments?

A: Yes, we have police reports. The more serious crime the more information.

Q: What do you do with your data once collected? In Switzerland files are deleted for young offenders. Is it the same in Belgium?

A: Yes. But courts can sometimes demand the opening of these files, so they are not deleted, just closed.

Q: You use the central eight for your general assessment. That is developed on a male population. How does that apply for women?

A: We use additional tools for women in the in-depth assessments.

Tailor-made risk assessment tools: The Pros and the Cons

Vaclav Jiricka, Head Psychologist of the Czech Prison Service

As early as in the 1960's there was a need for assessment tools because treatment was being introduced in Czech prisons. The first tools used were actually being smuggled from Denmark via Poland. In the 1970's the predictive instruments were introduced, consisting mostly on static factors.

OASys from England was tested in the early 2000's. Fotres, another external system was also tested but finally the Czechs came to the conclusion that a tailor-made instrument would be the most appropriate for their needs. That later became SARPO, the Czech risk assessment tool. Making it themselves provided the opportunity to make a comprehensive planning tool and not just an assessment tool. They share data with the probation service and since 2012 SARPO is fully operational in all prisons.

Interviews are performed by multidisciplinary teams and background information is brought in from many different sources. This is put into a RNR matrix to make a good plan and placement of the offender.

Q&A

Q: How does the SARPO model fit the legal system in Czech Republic?

A: Before it was hard to have a dialogue with politicians about the need for legal changes in harmony with the RNR framework. It is easier to present good arguments based on a self-built system, rather than an imported one.

Q: Is SARPO used for re-integration also?

A: The intention is to make it usable for conditional release. Today the main purpose is admission in prison and pre-sentence reports.

Q: Do you perform any audits of self-reported information?

A: Digital archives make more information accessible that is one way of confirming the authenticity of the information. Teams also make check-ups with family, social services etc. It is a kind of triangulation.

Q: Is the tool evaluated?

A: It has been evaluated four times and now Charles University makes a new evaluation with a bigger data set.

Q: What is the actual product here?

A: It is a software product. An 8-10 page form with reports and summaries, and algorithms for calculating risk levels.

From Screening to Clinical Evaluation: Organizing a Comprehensive Risk Assessment in Times of Limited Resources

Prof. Dr. Reinhard Eher, Head of the Federal Evaluation center for Violent and Sexual Offenders (FECVSO) in the ministry of Justice, Austria

What is risk? How can we measure an individual's risk? We need to capture individual risk relevant factors, and, link this information to a meaningful message about the probability of re-offending.

There are several ways of communicating risk. Here I am going to present two common ways: nominally (low-medium-high) and numerically (probability). Both methods of risk communication have their pros and cons

- *High, medium* and *low* is not clearly defined and is a subjective measure, as long as there is no common opinion about it
- Numerical risk communication – although superior to all other risk communication, and although derived from individual risk factors – it reports percentages or odds without any further understanding for the particular case

When it comes to validity an assessment tool need to be able to discriminate between those who reoffend and those who don't. It also needs to be proven to be valid in the given population and the given jurisdiction (predictive validity). Generally speaking the sensitivity is about 50 %, i.e. only 50 % of those who will reoffend, will be captured by a reasonable cut-off of the instrument. The specificity is generally about 70 %, i.e. about 30 % of those, who will not reoffend, will be labelled as high risk (false positives). In conclusion, it is harder to predict reoffending than desistance from crime.

The base rate of re-offending is very important, the lower the base rate the harder to estimate risk levels. This accounts for example for sexual offenses.

Assessment tools need to provide relevant risk categories, not just one cut-off. Risk categories have to be informative for decision makers and they should provide rich individual-level offender information as well as statistical indicators about the risk of reoffending.

Carl Hanson (Public Safety Canada) suggests a five level scale and in Austria a five level scale is now being used for sexual offenders (Static-99). With a five level instrument and validated categories the specificity will be higher (less false positives). In addition, each level corresponds to specific strategies for that level, for further information, see [powerpoint presentation](#).

Q&A

Q: How does this apply to women?

A: Of course this applies to women. You just need a base rate of reoffending and use the criminogenic needs based on a credible theoretical basis.

Q: What about gang leaders? They let others do the “dirty work”. Will they be detected?

A: Sorry, I can't help you here. It is a matter of validity. We know our instruments (Area under curve, AUC, of .75-.80).

Q: Do you think there is a “prison effect” as part of risk assessment?

A: There is no evidence that a prison stay in itself affect the risk of reoffending.

Q: Will more effective treatment cause a rebound on recidivism rates in the future? (Lower intake in prison with high profile offenders in prison)

A: No, well, we don't know. We hope that this system has contributed to lower recidivism (in Austria).

Mythology of risk assessment

Joakim Sturup, National Board of Forensic Medicine, Sweden

Today I will focus in three basic questions:

- The practical aspect (are risk assessment tools better than chance?)
- Yes, most of them are.
- The differential aspect (is any method superior to others?)
- No, there is little difference between instruments.
- The epistemological aspect (how accurate is accurate enough?)
- This not a question only for science to answer.

There are a number of biases affecting scientific results as well as everyday judgement:

- Publication or author bias
- Anchoring bias
- Confirmation bias
- Overconfidence
- Recency bias

Decision makers need to be well informed about the capabilities and limitations of risk assessment tools and the consequences of using them for different purposes. We need to separate empirical evidence from normative decisions.

With the current status of risk assessments clinicians should avoid situations where the assessed individual may be incarcerated due to what he or she is likely to do. However, I argue that it is acceptable and justifiable to conduct risk assessments when they can lead to something positive (e.g. time determined life sentence, earlier conditional release etc.). As far as standardized, valid and reliable methods are used and that the assessor is well aware of the recent scientific literature.

[For powerpoint presentation, click here](#)

Q&A

Together will the subsequent speaker.

Use and misuse of offender risk assessment

Dominik Lehner, Head Risk Assessment, Swiss Prison Service

Modern societies has moved from punishment by torture towards punishment by imprisonment. This has been a positive trend. But now we see that measures for crime prevention is a way to boost a political career. Crime prevention implies forms of crime prediction that is why risk assessment often is seen as a solution for crime prevention.

What about the future – where are we going and why?

Most people do not recognize a collective responsibility for crimes committed by others. This enables them to take on a hard line position. They don't see society as one whole, being responsible for crime.

In the eyes of the public a person is good or bad, so all we really need to do is to lock up the bad guys. Forensic psychiatry is able to make certain prognosis on human behaviour based on facts of his or her past behaviour. Is risk assessment leading in the wrong direction again?

One of the problems is the definition of failure. One released prisoner committing a crime is NOT a failure. But this is hard to grasp for the public.

Creating high numbers of false positives would be the easiest way to live up to the expectations of no re-offending. But at some point such a reaction in the name of “justice” will change to injustice for thousands of individuals. For justice to remain just, risk Assessment must become as qualified as possible and there must always be a possibility of challenging the decision based on the risk assessment by means of judicial appeal.

We must also bring down the expectations on risk assessment, to give decision makers and the public a more balanced view on what is actually predictable. Preventive sentencing raises so many questions about human rights. It calls for maximum quality and transparency in risk assessments.

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Q&A

Q: Do you think there is a risk of more incarceration with an increased use of risk assessments?

A: Joakim: Yes, that is why it is important with transparency about the limitations of risk assessments.

A: Dominik: The decisions and consequences are the dangers of risk assessment, not risk assessment in itself.

Q: Comment on Dominick's answer: What about the direct harmfulness of risk assessment. Ben Crews research on assessments in prison shows that it can be harmful in itself.

A: Dominik: I agree that this can be intrusive but still, you are monitored constantly in prison.

Q: Comment on Ethics in risk assessment in general: For some crime types the base rates of re-offending are low, which tend to create more false positives. Hence, the number needed to detain (NND) will be higher to achieve a protective effect.

Q: What about biases and random results? As we heard in Joakim's presentation there are a number of biases in this kind of operations.

A: Joakim: Well, there is a lot of research on biases that can help us understand these risks and manage them, or at least minimize them.

Q: Comment: Risk assessment tools can give an illusion of precision. I think that the RNR framework helps us focus on risk factors and not solely in prediction.

Q: Comment: Preventive detention does not exist in Finland. That is not relevant to Finnish authorities.

Risk, Need and Responsivity in Prison Services

Structured Assessment of Protective Factors for violence risk (SAPROF)

Michiel de Vries-Robbe, Senior Researcher, Netherlands

Risk and protective factors determine the risk of future violence. When the risk factors exceeds the protective factors a crime will be committed. It is a play of balance. Some risk factors can be moderated by protective factors.

Protective factors is focusing on strengths (Good Lives Model) and are important for treatment, risk management and motivation. Including protective factors also increase predictive accuracy.

SAPROF consist of three categories of items:

Internal factors

1. Intelligence
2. Secure attachment in childhood
3. Empathy
4. Coping
5. Self-control

Motivational factors

6. Work
7. Leisure activities
8. Financial management
9. Motivation for treatment
10. Attitudes towards authority
11. Life goals
12. Medication

External factors

13. Social network
14. Intimate relationship
15. Professional care
16. Living circumstances
17. External control

In Netherlands they assess risk and protective factors in multidisciplinary teams to avoid bias. Treatment planning should be based of *the narrative* of risk assessment, not the risk level.

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Q&A

Q: There seems to be a continuum for protective factors. Does that mean that the absence of a risk factor equals a protective factor?

A: No. Some factors are on a continuum, but some factors do not have counterparts.

Q: Why not do this pre-sentence?

A: In the Netherlands we include it in the pre-trial report. That gives us the ability to illustrate the consequences of a prison sentence.

Q: Is a certain amount of protective factors the same as resilience?

A: I cannot answer that on the base of this. Resilience research has a different empirical base.

Implementation of a RNR-assessment instrument – experiences and preliminary results

Martin Lardén, Head of Treatment Unit, Swedish Prison & Probation Service

Marcus Wågenberg, Analyst, Swedish Prison & Probation Service

RNR-A is a tool to decide on measures during the offender's time in the Swedish prison and probation service (SPPS). It was developed to improve sentence planning in the SPPS. There were documented problems with sentence planning, the use of assessment instruments was limited and risk assessment was more or less unstructured. Documentation was being done in retrospect rather than as future planning. It was also difficult to follow the client's progress.

Feasibility testing has been done and the tool is now implemented on full scale. Validation is performed stepwise, the SPPS is now on step 1 making a comparison to Crimrec, an instrument developed by Seena Fazel et al in Oxford. RNR-A seems to have a promising convergent validity. But the Hanson 5-level model may be better fit. The two coming steps in validation are predictive validity and the matching needs and interventions.

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Q&A

Q: How does RNR-A impact treatment planning?

A: So far we have seen a better matching of treatment programmes. The tool guides the assessor towards certain alternatives.

Q: If the tool suggest a treatment programme, and the client disagree, will you enforce the programme?

A: No, but then we work on their motivation.

Q: Does the tool suggest treatment dose with regard to risk level/risk factors?

A: Short programmes are being phased out in the SPPS. We use longer programmes for medium/high risk offenders and tailored programmes for those with complex needs.

BRIK - A different assessment tool from Norway

Gerhard Ploeg, Senior adviser at the Directorate for Norwegian Correctional Service

BRIK is the abbreviation for the Norwegian translation of Needs and Resources Assessment for the Correctional Service and it is a tool designed by the Service itself. Its theoretical starting points lie in the RNR- or “What works”-approach of looking at criminogenic needs, beside an approach based on Desistance theory and Good Life Model. Unlike many other assessment tools it is not focused on risk. Risk is determined on a case-to-case basis, a clinical, individual assessment without standardised, structured means of calculating levels.

BRIK asks for needs that must be addressed, but it also asks the offender what his or her strong points are and how these may be used in the reintegration process and contribute to a future existence within the boundaries of the law, as a valued member of the community. The offender is asked to describe what such a life would look like, and the opportunities, the possibilities and impossibilities of this are discussed. BRIK does look at the classical evidence-based criminogenic needs, but in addition it lets the offenders describe what they themselves see as problematic factors, independent of whether these have shown a statistical relationship with recidivism at an aggregated level.

BRIK is a data-based tool that is filled out while the assessor and the assessed sit together and look at the same screen. It is meant as a guide to the conversation and does not contain pre-formulated questions, but items stated as talking points. At the end of each category the offender sees the assessor’s conclusion and is given the opportunity to respond. The way the tool is used, the contents of the assessment and the close interaction between assessor and assessed are factors that are meant to contribute to developing a positive and trusting relationship between the offender and the correctional workers. The results are used in further case-management and - if this is deemed necessary - for further, more detailed assessment in specific areas. BRIK is in that way more of a screening-tool, serving to support the correctional worker in the prison and the probation office.

BRIK has been evaluated and both assessors and assessed appear to be satisfied with the way it functions. It was confirmed that it is a useful tool for case management, and that it strengthens the relationships. Clients were particularly pleased with being asked about their skills and strengths and that the focus was not just on their problems.

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Q&A

Q: How are assessors being trained?

A: The correctional workers who will be doing the assessments get specific training in the use of BRIK.

Q: You say that some offenders have unrealistic goals. Why is that bad?

A: When asked about their future, some might mention goals that are unattainable. We try to help the clients to set realistic objectives to which the Correctional service potentially can contribute.

Q: You call them assessors, but will the assessors be involved in treatment as well?

A: Our assessors may also be case-managers, but not for the same case they have assessed.

Q: What about pro-criminal attitudes? How is that assessed? For example a Bandidos member with lots of strengths and ambitious objectives.

A: Participating in a BRIK-assessment is voluntary. Some offenders are not interested in participating, and this might be one of those. The pro-criminal attitudes belong in the clinical, individual assessment of risk.

Q: Do you assess the quality of assessors' work? How do you assure the quality of assessments?

A: We have so called "experience meetings" where the assessors meet with each other nationally and discuss their challenges and the solutions they choose. Every assessment is seen, checked and approved by the management of the unit in question.

Sentence planning – practical experiences from Slovenia

Lucija Bozikov, Head of Treatment Division, Slovenian Prison Service

Slovenian prison service tries to build a good relationship between the client and the case manager/assessor. This calls for a safe environment and a relation built on trust. These are the basic ingredients for good assessments.

Slovenian prison service do not use any licensed tool for measuring inmates' recidivism, aggression or social risks. But treatment planning is still based on the RNR principles, where we try to establish a balance between security and treatment measures. The perspective when gathering information from the offender is broad: social services, the family etc. are included.

Assessments are used for placement in a certain prison facility as well as within the facility. It is also used for planning activities and rehab measures. We want to create a sense of positive view on the client and his/her ability to live without committing crimes in the future.

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Q&A

Q: Do probation and prison services work on the same sentence plan?

A: Well, the probation service actually bought a different system, OaSys from England. This complicate things because the systems are not connected.

Q: What sources of information do you use for these assessments?

A: As mentioned we gather information from a number of actors. But there is a gap between psychiatric care and other agencies, where we sometimes lack information.

Day 2

Specific risk assessments

The Clinical Risk Assessment and Management of Women:

Does gender really matter ...?

Dr. Caroline Logan, Lead Consultant Forensic Clinical Psychologist in the NHS, honorary Research Fellow, University of Manchester, England

Why bother with women? Well firstly, minority groups will always test a system's ability to manage diversity. Secondly, female offenders might be small in numbers (15% of arrests, 5% of prison population, 15% of probation population), but they are large in efforts.

Women are not funny shaped men. The women's relation to children is of specific concern. Crimes of women are often perpetrated in the domestic context. Victims are persons that are depending on them. These relationships we have to target in risk assessment of female offenders, as well as for risk management.

The meaning of crimes are also different between men and women. Risks do not look like those in men and that implies a different view on both victims and treatment. We talk about emotional abuse and neglect rather than physical violence.

As with male offenders, we need to target the motivational drivers of crime. To be able to allocate resources effectively we need to use *triage*, some kind of sorting of cases on the basis of concern. This is done through risk assessment.

Step two is risk management, to handle risks and promote protective factors.

Different risk assessment tools give you varying *granularity*, different levels of detail.

In conclusion, the strength of any system of harm prevention lies in its capacity to understand and manage the risks posed by minority groups:

- women
- people with learning difficulties
- people with autism spectrum conditions
- minority ethnic groups
- and so on...

Our image of women blurs the mind when it comes to handling offenders. The risks presented by women may be neutralised by our desire not to see women as harmful, especially towards those most dependent upon them. This tendency can make us blind to the harm potential of women or more likely to minimise it, overlook it, and care less about it. This will leave vulnerable people at risk.

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Q&A

Q: What is your view on mixing male and female offenders?

A: I prefer segregated facilities, both hospitals and prisons. It is more of a distraction mixing sexes than of some therapeutic value. You should mix staff instead!

Q: Do you think we need a PCL-R (Psychopathy Checklist) for women?

A: No, I would like to scrap PCL-R for all offenders. It is not a risk assessment tool. It is predictive because antisocial behaviour predicts antisocial behaviour. There are other tools that assess psychopathy in both men and women, such as CAPP.

Q: What about victims?

A: My point here is that women's victims will suffer an increased risk of creating anti-social behaviour themselves, both sons and daughters. Investing in female offenders is investing in long term crime prevention.

Capturing Risk, Need and Risk Relevant Change in Sexual Offenders

Prof. Dr. Reinhard Eher, Head of the Federal Evaluation center for Violent and Sexual Offenders (FECVSO) in the ministry of Justice, Austria

When it comes to sex offenders, there is empirical support for using the RNR model here as well. In Austria the base rate of reoffending for sex offenders is 5,4 % (5-year follow up). Testing Karl Hanson's five level risk model it seems to apply also to this group of offenders.

Criminogenic Needs represent dynamic risk factors. These factors are changeable by definition but usually need treatment and/or supervision to be changed. What dynamic risk factors shall we target in sexual offenders? Today, the evidence gives us these three constructs:

- Sexual self-regulation
- Intimacy deficits
- General self-regulation

Validity testing of the tools STABLE 2000 and 2007 indicates that the construct *attitudes supportive of sexual assault* have little predictive value compared to the three above.

Clinical override: If you find factors that are not considered as risk factors in your tool, for example depression, you should define them as increasing the risk.

Measuring risk change. The tool VRS:SO is based on 7 static and 17 dynamic factors. It also has a change scale. Together with the “Stages of Change Model” VRS:SO is very useful to measure change of risk in sexual offenders.

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Q&A

Q: How can we know that a need is criminogenic?

A: It depends on your diagnosis of the client and your theory of what drives this specific individual’s criminality. Depression is a good example; in the individual case it may enhance anti-social thinking.

Q: Can you use Static-99 in prison? It was developed for use in public supervision.

A: Yes, no problem.

Q: VRS, violence risk scale, is anyone in the room using VRS in their service?

A: In Austria VRS is now being implemented on mass scale in the prison service. We want to have a common language about change.

The risk assessment of violent extremism: Challenges, lessons learned and future directions

Christopher Dean, Chartered and Registered Forensic Psychologist, Director of Identify Psychological Services and Senior Fellow at the Global Center of Cooperative Security, England

There are differences between assessing violent extremism and other risk assessments. The nature of this kind of offending differs from other kinds of violence. The purpose of violent extremism (VE) is to bring about political change. VE are acts of violence committed on behalf of a group, cause or ideology creating immediate victims as well as secondary victims. Both effects are important for perpetrators.

The base rate of reoffending is extremely low in VE, if even measurable. Therefore it is impossible to create prediction models.

So, what are we assessing then? Here we need to move forward with caution. There are few empirical results and the whole field is under development. Instead of risk factors we here talk about risk dimensions:

1. Engagement
2. Intent
3. Capability
4. Context

These four dimensions can also be assessed from the perspective of change. In VE contextual change is crucial, geopolitical change might alter the risk acutely.

What we need to do is to combine What Works knowledge with innovation, and try to find a balance between the two. Structured Professional Judgement is already there. Structured and transparent assessments are important, even if they are not validated. And do not lose sight of the literature on desistance and resilience.

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Q&A

Q: What about female roles in VE? Does risk assessment need to be adjusted to women?

A: It is essential to consider the individual in this case. Accommodating all idiosyncratic factors is extremely crucial. Be open minded!

Q: These networks work in the dark. What about intelligence data? In Switzerland information flows on a one way street from prison services to the secret service, but not the other way around.

A: It the same case in the UK. Prisons do not get much back. Multidisciplinary intelligence processing is a way forward here.

Comment: In Italy and Sweden they have a formalised function for exchange of intelligence.

A: A rapid assessment has a certain value, even if the secret service has other kinds of intelligence.

Q: How about the risk of discrimination? Developers of the ERG tool came under scrutiny and where attacked for political reasons.

A: We have to talk about that and address these risks.

A comparison of VERA2 and ERG 22+ in the light of the French context

Professor Martine Herzog-Evans, PhD, University of Reims, Law faculty

In France there are de-radicalisation centres run by third sector parties. The French probation service use VERA2 for assessment of VE. But these third sector parties were insecure about what tool to use, a comparison was needed.

The overlap between the instruments is considerable large but there are more independent research controlling for ERG22 than for VERA. It also has broader local testing which is important. VERA, on the other hand, has a higher threshold in legal terms.

Both tools have confusing goals, i.e. the purpose is not clear.

Both tools refer to ideology but that dimension is more central in VERA. Both focus on identity but that is more central in ERG22.

VERA contain protective factors, but there are some problems with that.

Both tools lack an item on *cognitive resources*, which probably would be useful.

In sum, ERG22 stands out for use in France.

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Q&A

Q: On what indication can ERG/VERA be used?

A: If the person shows interest in these matters and risk to be convicted for it. ERG got a lower threshold though. No index offence is needed for neither of the tools.

Q: How do you measure cognitive flexibility/rigidity?

A: There is no established tool for that. We do our own assessments.

Closing words

Kirsten Hawlitschek, Executive Director EuroPris

European Commission

Jesca Bener, European Commission

There are funding possibilities for this kind of activities and projects. Right now EC finance 20 projects. Enter *DG Justice/Funding/Call for interest* for more information.

Request for assistance

Martin Lulej, Slovakian Prison Service

Slovakian prison service asks for assistance in ongoing modification of their risk assessment tool.

Questions are presented in powerpoint presentation.

[For powerpoint presentation, click here](#)