



Topics in Community Corrections



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Assessment Issues for Managers

National Institute of Corrections

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Foreword

The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) has identified the implementation of evidence-based principles as an area of primary focus, both in its assistance to state and local agencies and in its own strategic plan. Worth noting is the emphasis on implementation: using the research principles in actual field practice. Research teaches us that disciplined application of these principles—really working them consistently, day in and day out—can reduce offenders’ likelihood to commit new crimes. NIC is interested in the proposition that better public safety outcomes can be achieved when corrections agencies and systems strategically organize around these principles. The particular evidence-based principle that drives this transformational change is the assessment of risk.

This issue of *Topics in Community Corrections* has been written by practitioners and researchers who are currently immersed in improving information related to offender risk. They were invited to contribute to this document because they have already been applying assessment instruments in the field, using assessment information in offender case plans, and measuring the results. NIC is taking advantage of their practical experience and years of outcome study to help clarify the risk principle and ways to make its application manageable.

Their papers are organized to address concerns with defining risk in the first place, choosing a tool that makes sense, validating the tool, and ensuring the link between risk assessment and case management. The daunting issues of quality assurance, training, and outcome measurement are also discussed, with examples of what these critical components actually look like in practice. Finally, one working manager gives his perspective on the reality of putting together the pieces of risk assessment in a community corrections agency, soup-to-nuts.

On behalf of NIC, I want to thank all the writers who graciously agreed to donate their time to contribute to this issue. All are extremely competent, talented, and busy professionals who are passionate about pushing the corrections field toward crime reduction goals that are achievable through the application of evidence-based principles. We hope you find their observations and recommendations useful as you begin or continue to develop practical, evidence-based strategies for your agencies.

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Understanding the Risk Principle: How and Why Correctional Interventions Can Harm Low-Risk Offenders

Over the last several years, the importance of the risk principle has been well established in many correctional settings. Simply stated, the risk principle indicates that offenders should be provided with supervision and treatment levels that are commensurate with their risk levels. However, there continues to be some confusion regarding the implications of the risk principle and why the trends predicted by the risk principle are observed. The purpose of this article is to discuss what the risk principle is, what it means for corrections, and why we see intensive treatments and supervision leading to no effect or increased recidivism for low-risk offenders.

Perhaps it is important that we begin by defining the concept of “risk” as it pertains to offender recidivism. For some, “risk” is a concept associated with the seriousness of the crime—for example, in the sense that a felon poses a higher risk than a misdemeanor. In actuality, however, though a felon has been convicted of a more serious offense than a misdemeanor, his or her relative risk of reoffending may have nothing to do with the seriousness of the crime.

For our purposes, “risk” refers to the probability of reoffending. A low-risk offender is one with a relatively low probability of reoffending (few risk factors), while a high-risk offender has a high probability (many risk factors). The application of the concept in corrections is similar to that in most actuarial sciences. For example, life insurance is cheaper for a nonsmoker in his 40s than for a smoker of the same age. The reason insurance costs more for the smoker is that smokers have a risk factor that is significantly correlated with health problems. Similarly, an offender who uses drugs has a higher chance of reoffending than someone who does not use drugs.

In 1990, Andrews, Bonta, and Hoge discussed the importance of the risk principle as it relates to the assessment of offenders. Their article makes clear that the risk principle calls for the administration and delivery of more intense services and supervision to higher-risk offenders. In contrast, lower-risk offenders should receive lower levels of supervision and treatment. Since 1990, considerable research has investigated how adhering to the risk principle can impact a correctional program’s effectiveness.

Meta-Analyses Involving the Risk Principle

Meta-analysis after meta-analysis has revealed a similar trend when the risk principle is empirically investigated. Table 1, page 4, shows the results of seven meta-

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analyses conducted on juvenile and adult offenders in correctional programs or school-aged youth in school-based intervention programs.

The first row of the table lists the results from a study conducted by Andrews, Zinger, Hoge, et al. (1990). This study investigated the effects of correctional interventions from 85 studies. Overall, they found that the correctional programs were much more effective when the correctional program took in mostly higher-risk offenders. Reductions in recidivism of 11% were noted in programs that had mostly higher-risk offenders versus 2% reductions for programs that took in both low- and high-risk offenders (re-analysis by Andrews and Bonta, 1998).

The second, third, and fourth rows summarize the findings of studies conducted by Dowden and Andrews. These three meta-analyses all indicate that programs serving a greater percentage of higher-risk offenders were more effective than those that did not. This finding was observed when looking at juvenile offenders, female offenders, and violence as an outcome measure.

The fifth row reports on the results of a meta-analysis that reviewed the effectiveness of drug courts. Again, drug courts where over half the offenders served had a prior record were twice as effective (10% versus 5% reduction) as drug courts where more than half the offenders served were first-time offenders. Finally, two meta-analyses report on the effectiveness of school-based interventions in reducing delinquent and analogous behaviors (Wilson, Gottfredson, and Najaka, 2002) and aggressive behavior (Wilson, Lipsey, and Derzon, 2003). Both studies indicate better effects when targeting youths who are at risk for the particular behaviors that are to be prevented.

Table 1. Summary of Meta-Analyses Investigating the Risk Principle

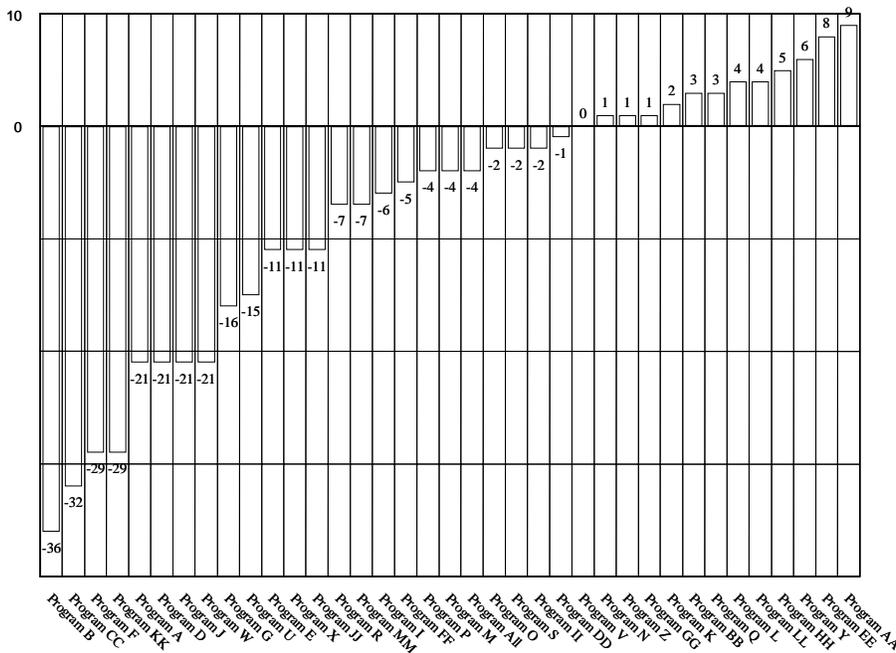
Study	No. of Studies Reviewed	Type of Studies Reviewed	Findings
Andrews et al. (1990)	85	Juvenile, mixed	Effect size 5 times as great when focusing on high-risk
Dowden and Andrews (1999a)	26	Juvenile and adult female, or mainly female	Effect size 6 times as great when following risk principle
Dowden and Andrews (1999b)	229	Young offenders	Effect size 4 times as great when when following risk principle
Dowden and Andrews (2000)	35	Juvenile and adult violent outcomes only	Effect size 2 times as great when when following risk principle
Lowenkamp et al. (2002)	33	Juvenile and adult drug courts	Effect size 2 times as great when when following risk principle
Wilson et al. (2002)	165	School-based interventions	Effect size 3 times as great when when targeting high-risk youth
Wilson et al. (2003)	221	School-based interventions targeting aggression	Effect size 4 times as great when when targeting high-risk youth

Differing Treatment Effects for High- and Low-Risk Offenders

While Table 1 provides plenty of support for the risk principle, a recent study that Lowenkamp and Latessa (2002) conducted in Ohio offers even more evidence. This study is the largest ever conducted of community-based correctional treatment facilities. The authors tracked a total of 13,221 offenders who were placed in one of 38 halfway houses and 15 community-based correctional facilities throughout the state. A 2-year follow-up was conducted on all offenders, and recidivism measures included new arrests and incarceration in state penal institutions. Treatments effects were calculated, which represent the difference in recidivism rates for the treatment group (those offenders with a residential placement) and the comparison group (those offenders that received just supervision with no residential placement).

Figure 1 shows the effect for low-risk offenders, using incarceration as the outcome measure. The negative numbers show the programs that were associated with increases in recidivism rates for low-risk offenders. The positive numbers show the few programs that were actually associated with reductions in recidivism for low-risk offenders. As you can see from this figure, the majority of programs in this study were associated with increases in the failure rates for low-risk offenders. Only a handful of programs reduced recidivism for this group, and the largest reduction was 9%.

Fig. 1 Changes in the Probability of Recidivism by Program for Low-Risk Offenders



Why Interventions Are More Successful with High-Risk Offenders

A question that continues to arise is why an intervention can have the intended consequences for a high-risk offender but have undesired and unintended consequences for a low-risk offender. To answer this question, one only need look at the risk factors for offending behavior. A review of the meta-analyses on the risk predictors consistently reveals antisocial attitudes, associates, personality, and a history of antisocial behavior as the strongest predictors (Andrews and Bonta, 1998). Other risk factors include substance abuse and alcohol problems, family characteristics, education, and employment (Gendreau, Little, and Goggin, 1996).

Given these risk factors, consider what a high-risk and a low-risk offender would look like. High-risk offenders would have antisocial attitudes, associates, and personalities, or a long criminal history, or substance abuse problems, or poor family relations, and would likely be unemployed. Low-risk offenders, on the other hand, would be fairly prosocial and have good jobs with some, if not many, prosocial contacts. That is, low-risk offenders likely have good jobs, good relationships with their families, good relationships with prosocial acquaintances, fairly prosocial attitudes, a limited criminal history, and few if any substance abuse problems. What happens to that low-risk offender when he/she is placed in a residential facility with high-risk offenders? You have likely come to an explanation for why we see low-risk offenders being harmed by intense correctional interventions.

The increased failure rates of low-risk offenders can largely be understood when considering the following three explanations:

- ◆ When we place low-risk offenders in the more intense correctional interventions, we are probably exposing them to higher-risk offenders, and we know that who your associates are is an important risk factor. Practically speaking, placing high- and low-risk offenders together is never a good idea. If you had a son or daughter who got into some trouble, would you want him or her placed in a group with high-risk kids?
- ◆ When we take lower-risk offenders, who by definition are fairly prosocial (if they weren't, they wouldn't be low-risk), and place them in a highly structured, restrictive program, we actually disrupt the factors that make them low-risk. For example, if I were to be placed in a correctional treatment program for 6 months, I would lose my job, I would experience family disruption, and my prosocial attitudes and prosocial contacts would be cut off and replaced with antisocial thoughts and antisocial peers. I don't think my neighbors would have a "welcome home from the correctional program" party for me when I was released. In other words, my risk would be increased, not reduced.
- ◆ Other factors such as IQ, intellectual functioning, and maturity might be at work. We rarely find programs that assess these important responsibility factors when they place offenders into groups. It could be the case that there

are some low-functioning, low-risk offenders who are manipulated by more sophisticated, higher-risk, predatory offenders.

What all this means for corrections is that low-risk offenders should be identified and excluded, as a general rule, from higher-end correctional interventions. We are pragmatists and therefore say “general rule,” as we realize that programs are often at the mercy of the court or parole board in terms of who is referred to the program. Even so, programs that end up receiving low-risk offenders should make sure that those offenders are returned back to the environments that made them “low-risk.” This can be achieved by developing programming (both treatment and supervision) that is based on the risk level of the offender.

In addition, the research reviewed here and the risk principle also dictate that we should direct the majority of services and supervision to higher-risk offenders because it is with this group of offenders that such interventions are most effective. The first step in meeting the risk principle is identifying the appropriate targets (higher-risk offenders). To achieve this, agencies must assess offenders with standardized and objective risk assessment instruments. Risk assessment is now considered the cornerstone of effective correctional intervention. ■

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In Search of a Risk Instrument

Administrators of community corrections agencies have as one of our responsibilities ensuring that the assessments conducted with offenders provide useful information to our staff, to help them address both supervision and treatment issues. When staff lack access to information related to offenders' risk to re-offend, case supervision decisions are based primarily on informal assessments using criminal history, current offense, or observations. Although these types of judgments are important in immediate, emergency, or temporary decision-making, there is a considerable body of research that finds these methods less reliable than other, more formal methods of assessment (Dolney, McShane, and Williams, 2000).

When choosing which assessment instrument to use, an organization should consider a number of factors. I hope that this article will assist administrators in making the critical decisions related to choosing a risk instrument.

Purpose and Fit with the Organization's Mission

One of the first considerations in selecting a risk assessment instrument is its intended purpose. Will the instrument be used as a general, broad tool to measure offenders' overall risk to re-offend, or will specific populations of offenders need to be identified for programmatic or targeted services?

There are numerous assessment instruments used throughout the country that measure a variety of offender characteristics, including criminal history, education, substance abuse, interpersonal skills, social support, vocational aptitude, violence risk, and self-esteem. No one instrument measures all these attributes, and even if such an instrument did exist, it would probably be time-consuming to administer, difficult to score, and complicated to use. Therefore, agencies need to carefully define the intended purpose for the instrument they want to employ.

How the instrument "fits" into the organization's mission also is a critical consideration if the instrument is to be effective. If the organization focuses on the enforcement of conditions of probation/parole and offers few rehabilitative services, then an instrument identifying specific need areas may not be as useful as a general risk instrument. However, if the agency and the community have the resources and a system in place to address rehabilitation issues, then an instrument that provides measures of criminogenic needs and assists in case planning issues would be in order.

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In-House vs. Outsourced Instruments

Once purpose and fit have been considered, an agency can decide whether to use an existing instrument or to develop its own. This decision can be complicated. The following considerations can help an agency decide which approach to use.

Use an existing, off-the-shelf tool? Many of the instruments currently used by organizations across the country can be purchased for use on a per-unit basis. One of the most commonly used assessment tools is the Level of Service Inventory–Revised (LSI-R) (Andrews and Bonta, 1995).

There are a number of advantages to using an existing assessment tool. An existing tool is likely to have many resources already in place, such as the forms, training curriculum, available trainers, and software (Ferguson, 2002). It is also likely that an existing tool has already been validated on some correctional population (Ferguson, 2002). Further validation on your population would be necessary to ensure the instrument accurately measures the criminogenic needs of your offenders.

One disadvantage of an existing assessment instrument is the cost associated with its use, which may include ongoing costs related to revisions, training, and software. If resources exist to purchase such existing instruments, however, administrators would do well choosing these valid, useful tools.

Develop a new assessment instrument? This approach also has advantages and disadvantages. Ferguson (2002) indicates that when developing a new tool, involving staff in the process may help increase their willingness to use the information provided by the assessment. She also indicates that there may also be fewer ongoing costs than for an off-the-shelf instrument.

However, a disadvantage of developing a new tool is that the instrument will have to be tested for validity and reliability in the jurisdiction in which it was developed. Additional work is also required to develop the instrument, the training curriculum, and to train trainers (Ferguson, 2002). If administrators choose this option, they should use the services of either a consultant or university personnel familiar with validating assessment instruments and with the research on predicting criminal behavior.

Use an existing public domain tool? Instruments in the public domain have been developed by public agencies, using taxpayer funds, and are therefore available for other agencies to use. Occasionally, the agencies that developed the tool will copyright the instrument, either to maintain the initial integrity of the instrument or to provide some control in training the agency requesting its use.

An example of a public domain instrument is the Offender Screening Tool (OST) developed by the Maricopa County Adult Probation Department. This general risk instrument has been validated and is being adopted on a statewide basis in Arizona. It was developed by Probation Department staff and a forensic

consultant, and it is available for other agencies to use without ongoing costs. Other public domain instruments exist and may be well worth investigating; the NIC Information Center can assist in this investigation.

System/Process Implications

One of the most important considerations in choosing a risk instrument is how it will relate to the agency's current systems of operation:

- ◆ Does the tool require the use of resources or additional time currently not available to the agency, or will the tool be easily incorporated in existing business processes?
- ◆ Will the instrument be administered at the pre-adjudication or presentence phase, or in the post-sentencing supervision period?
- ◆ Will the instrument be administered to all offenders or to targeted offenders meeting certain criteria?

The answers to these questions will, in large part, determine the success of implementing the tool, including how staff will accept it.

I experienced the importance of these questions first-hand when the Maricopa County Adult Probation Department was searching for a general risk instrument in the mid-1990s. An existing risk instrument was piloted in the presentence division of the department, and staff were required to administer the tool along with continuing the routine practice of completing a presentence report. The new tool added 45 minutes to what was already a tight workload schedule. Staff conveyed their concerns to the agency management, who agreed. The agency then developed a new risk instrument, which was incorporated into the pre-existing processes, thereby adding very little additional time or work. The importance of respecting established processes and involving staff in any changes cannot be over-emphasized.

Format of Assessment Results

Agency administrators also should consider how the results of the assessment instrument will be presented, in terms of whether staff will understand them and be able to use them in case planning and decision-making. Some instruments present the results in a numeric score that the agency then converts into a supervision level. These instruments become part of a broader classification system that drives minimum contact standards. On the other hand, some more recently developed instruments provide graphical displays of the results, making interpretation easier, especially if the results will be shared with offenders. The more "user-friendly" the results of the assessment are, the more likely it is that staff will use the information in case management and supervision decisions.

Ease of Administration

The final consideration is how difficult it is to administer the instrument. Instruments can be self-administered, interview-based, or completed by staff without the offender being present. It is important to determine whether staff who will be administering an instrument require a higher academic degree, specialized training, or enhanced interpersonal skills to complete an assessment.

The time to administer instruments also varies and can range from minutes to hours. Agency resources and business processes must be considered if time-intensive instruments will be selected. Again, staff involvement in the selection process is highly recommended.

Assessment as the Foundation

The National Institute of Corrections's model for implementing evidence-based practices in community corrections identifies eight principles for effective interventions with offenders. The first principle is "Assessing Offender Risk and Needs." This principle is the basic building block on which organizations can provide effective interventions to change offender behavior and more effectively protect communities.

Identifying and implementing effective risk assessment instruments within our organizations is a priority to which administrators must commit both resources and their leadership. Although the selection of an assessment instrument may appear daunting and complicated, conducting the business of supervising criminal offenders without effective assessments is inappropriate—and worse yet, it is bad business. ■

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Quality Assurance and Training in Offender Assessment

Considerable time and effort are required to select the assessment tool that will be used in a specific correctional setting. Issues such as validity, cost, and purpose of the assessment must be taken into consideration during the laborious process. Once an agency has made the decision about its tool, many more weeks and months of planning are required to discuss the necessary training and to identify a consultant and method of payment. The trainer then conducts the training, and the staff is charged with implementing the tool. At that point, the committee that steered the project often disbands or moves on to something else, and the project is viewed as completed.

This common way of operating is the biggest mistake that agencies make when moving to a new risk assessment. Good assessment involves more than initial training, scoring the tool, and paying consultant fees. In order to reap the real benefits of a risk assessment, an agency must establish a process to ensure that the tool will be scored and used correctly after the consultant leaves. The agency's project team and management need to develop policies and procedures that require ongoing training and continued quality assurance procedures. They must consider the mission and goals of the agency, the approach to be taken in enforcing policies and procedures, and the resources that will be needed to implement the tool fully and effectively.

Integrating Assessments with Agency Mission

Most departments develop vision and mission statements, but they often fail to see how these statements are linked to the assessment process. This link is critical, however, to ensure both the credibility and the ongoing use of the assessment. For example, if the assessment identifies needs that have not been defined as mission-critical, training or quality assurance measures may be ignored when budgets become tight, or the tool may even be targeted for abandonment. There is a cost to quality assurance and training, both fiscally and in terms of staff time. Upper managers must be invested in the assessment process and support the fiscal responsibilities that accompany the proper use of assessments.

It is important for an agency to determine if the assessment process will help achieve its vision and mission. For example, if the mission includes "protection of the public," how does a risk assessment tool address that statement? One could argue that the assessment will guide scarce resources to treat only the highest-risk offenders identified by the tool. However, if the tool is overridden and not trusted, it may appear expendable when a budget crisis occurs. It is therefore important to tie the assessment process into an agency's vision and mission.

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Providing a Structure for Quality Control

Once an agency determines that the assessment is in line with its vision and mission, administrators must decide if they are willing to allocate resources to implement the tool properly. This means more than solid initial training; it also requires an internal structure to support ongoing training and quality assurance.

The internal structure must include staff who not only are skilled in using the assessment but also can train others and provide quality assurance. Often those chosen to fulfill this role are also expected to continue to carry high caseloads or other demanding job duties. In addition, it is often line staff and not management who have the skill sets that make them good trainers and quality assurance providers. These staff are then put into the difficult position of having to give feedback to their peers; some feel that this role crosses into a management responsibility, especially if evaluations are tied to performance. Therefore, when determining who will be responsible for quality assurance and training, it is important to consider if the person chosen has the skills and abilities, the right personality to train staff, and if the agency can adequately free his/her time to do this task.

Building a strong internal structure saves money by eliminating the need to bring in outside consultants to train staff every time there is turnover, and it also creates the capacity to provide quality assurance. Ideally, trainers and quality assurance providers should be those who use the tool on a daily basis or have extensive knowledge of the assessment tool based on hands-on-experience. They should have time dedicated solely to the purpose of providing continued training and oversight to other staff. Specific resources for ongoing oversight and training are thus critical for the assessment process and cannot be ignored.

Inter-rater reliability, or the ability to get the same score on the same offender with two different raters, must be achieved in order for the tool to have credibility with staff—as well as for the obvious reason of the usefulness of the tool itself. An agency must be able to track if the tool is being scored correctly. Ideally, databases should allow for tracking and investigating large discrepancies. At a minimum, the agency should establish a policy and procedure that speaks to the issue of training and quality assurance, and it should address the tracking of data. (See for example the policy developed for the State of Iowa on pages 16–19.)

Providing Effective Initial Training

Initial training for staff should cover not only the “rules” of how to score the tool, but also the theory that supports the tool and the research that found the tool valid. Time also is well spent in practicing how to score the tool properly. Many tools require proficiency in interviewing skills or the ability to build rapport with the offender. Others require knowledge of social learning theory, the ability to track collateral information, and/or skills in motivational interviewing. To save staff time and money, training in these higher-level skills is often ignored, and the consultant is “talked into” delivering only a 2-day training session. When this occurs, a staff person might know the “rules” for conducting the assessment but lack the skills to elicit accurate information.

Failing to provide sufficient initial scoring practice, follow-up training sessions (“booster sessions”), and training in the theory that supports the tool can not only set the stage for inaccurate scoring but can also provide ammunition for those who were against the assessment tool in the first place. Therefore, adequate initial training that includes role-plays and practice as well as building interview skills should not be ignored; it plays a vital role in quality assurance.

Ongoing Quality Assurance

Trainers and quality assurance staff may also have a tendency to drift from the original intent and scoring rules of the assessment. For this reason, agencies should continue to provide refresher training for this group as well. The training can be as simple as viewing a video of an assessment and having the group score and then discuss the rating. Based on these “mini”-trainings, the lead for the project can determine if the group is cohesive in its understanding of the scoring. If the agency has not identified a person to lead the project, it may want to consider bringing a consultant in at least yearly to work with the identified trainers and quality assurance providers.

Quality assurance should include a periodic review of assessments and scoring. This can be done either by directly viewing the staff conducting the assessment or by videotape. This process allows the quality assurance provider to ascertain if the assessing staff member lacks understanding of the scoring rules or if any weaknesses are a sign of inadequate interviewing skills. A review form should be used so that feedback is given to staff in a consistent manner.

To save time, computers may be used for training and review. Trainees can watch a videorecorded assessment interview on their office computers, score the tool, and receive immediate feedback on any items that were not scored correctly. The training staff should record data from these sessions, as well, not just to see what specific training an individual may need, but also to look for trends or for areas that different staff are consistently scoring incorrectly.

Thinking Ahead

Quality assurance can be an afterthought when an agency implements a new assessment tool. This approach is dangerous, as it can critically affect the validity of the tool. As much effort should go into developing a system of ongoing training and quality assurance as was initially needed to identify the correct tool.

- ◆ Internal structures should be formed and maintained via training.
- ◆ Quality should be monitored by policy and measured, recorded, and reviewed.

Quality assurance takes staff time and money. If the agency is unable to support it, then its use of an assessment tool should be re-evaluated. ■

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ASSESSMENT AND CASE PLANNING POLICIES

POLICY: The Judicial District Departments of Correctional Services shall use the statewide case management system to ensure that offender risk and criminogenic needs are identified and addressed in an effort to lower risk and reduce victimization. This system is intended to focus the majority of resources on moderate and high risk offenders and shall include the following elements: on-going risk and need assessment, responsivity, case planning, case plan follow-up and documentation, transfer of records, staff training, and quality assurance.

A. New Case Requirements:

1. Date of Assignment – Date of assignment is the date the supervisor transmits the instruction to the supervising officer that the case has been assigned

The following new case requirements, with the exception of the Iowa Risk Assessment, must be completed within 60 days of the date of assignment for field services or 30 days from the date of assignment for residential cases.

2. Assessment

a. Iowa Risk (field service cases only)

1. The Iowa Risk Classification must be completed on all new field service cases, within 30 days.
2. The Iowa risk classification instrument shall act as a pre-screen for the LSI-R.
3. If an offender scores 11 and below:
 - aa. an LSI-R (re)assessment is not required, unless the instrument is overridden to high normal or above for any reason.
 - bb. but a subsequent Iowa risk reassessment score is 12 or above, then an LSI must be done.

b. LSI

Attached is the LSI Interview Guide. Items on the guide can be added but not deleted. For reasons of validity, the highlighted items or portions of items can only be completed via personal interview. Therefore, if the Interview Guide is mailed to offenders for completion prior to an interview, these items must be deleted and then addressed in the interview.

1. Assessment

- aa. An LSI-R assessment shall be completed as part of all presentence investigations.
- bb. When an offender is sentenced without a PSI, an LSI-R assessment is completed on all field service cases scoring 12 or above on the Iowa risk classification instrument. An LSI-R is completed on cases overridden to high normal or intensive supervision as per item 2.a.3 above.
- cc. When an offender is sentenced without a PSI, an LSI-R is completed on all new residential cases, except for placements of sixty days or less.
- dd. Violation reports when the Iowa Risk Score is 11 and below and a recommendation for prison or a residential facility is being considered.
- ee. At the time of referral to the Violator Program.

2. Reassessments:

- aa. A reassessment should be completed when new information is received that indicates additional or different need areas or interventions in the case plan.
- bb. Once a case has had an LSI-R completed, reassessments must be based on the following events:
 - 1) When filing a violation report and a recommendation for prison or a residential facility is being considered.
 - 2) At the time of a referral to the Violator Program.
 - 3) If none of the above occurs, an LSI-R reassessment shall be completed every twelve months.

2. Assessment – (continued)

- 4) If the Iowa Risk Score is or becomes 11 or below and the case is not overridden to high normal or above then an LSI-R reassessment is not required. If the Iowa Risk Score is or becomes 12 or above then an LSI-R reassessment must be done at the appropriate time.

c. Responsivity

1. Staff are to complete a responsivity assessment prior to development of the case plan. Districts may choose to use either of the following assessment instruments:
 - aa. Jesness Inventory
 - bb. Client Management Classification (CMC)
- d. Other Assessments – In addition to the Jesness or CMC, other assessments are used for specialized need areas such as sexual offending, battering, and substance abusing.

3. Case Planning

a. A case plan is required:

1. on all cases that score 12 and above on the Iowa risk assessment.
2. on cases overridden to high normal.
3. on cases that initially scored 11 and below but, when reassessed scored 12 or above.
Note: When a case is received under supervision and an LSI-R has already been done, the following is recommended as a means to facilitate the formulation of a case plan: the LSI-R should be reviewed by the receiving officer for validity and to understand need areas identified. Further, in an early meeting with the offender, the officer should review selected sections; usually those identified as high need areas, and discuss/probe as appropriate.

b. Problem Prioritization

1. Criminogenic needs are identified using the LSI-R QuikScore.
2. These identified needs shall be numerically prioritized. Use of SAQI in determining priorities is recommended but not required.
3. The prioritized needs are listed on the first page of the case plan and are the only needs addressed in the Action Plan.

c. Action Plan

1. The fill in the blank items are intended to probe beneath the surface in an effort to facilitate internalized behavior change and are accomplished by negotiating with the offender.
2. “I have a tendency to _____ when ____ ...” is aimed at understanding the need being met by the illegal behavior or the conditions under which the illegal behavior occurs.
3. “Worst result...” is intended to get at what might motivate the offender to work to avoid getting into the criminal justice system again.
4. “Goal...” is to help the offender focus on some end result.
5. “The benefits to me...” is intended to facilitate cost/benefit analysis.
6. The interventions listed in the blank space under “Goal” must be based on what is done/available/required locally. These will be formal interventions, such as substance abuse treatment or anger management class.
7. The section entitled “other tasks/activities” is for things that are more concrete, individualized, creative, such as journaling or role-plays.
8. The review/approval line is signed according to local policy and a copy of the completed plan is given to the offender.
Note: Multiple need areas may be blended into one case plan if they are interrelated to the problem area and understandable to the offender.

d. Case Plan Follow-Up and Documentation

1. Case plan review/revision is an ongoing process and shall be conducted based on the following:
 - aa. contact standards according to risk.
 - bb. Need areas/interventions identified by the LSI-R reassessment or progress on case plan objectives.
 - cc. Supervision by profile using the CMC and/or Jesness.
2. Case plan documentation is done in the event logs.

4. Quality Assurance

- a. Districts shall ensure that all case management staff; i.e. staff whose job duties include doing the LSI-R or using the LSI-R to develop case plans, becomes certified to administer and score the LSI-R.
 1. Initial LSI-R training will be provided at new employee training/orientation sessions to be held periodically, as need dictates.
 2. Follow-up LSI-R training will be provided approximately 2 to 6 months following successful completion of the initial training. This training must be completed in order for a staff person to be certified in the LSI-R.
 3. Certification and quality assurance standards are as follows:
 - aa. Certification Process
 - 1) Complete weeklong LSI-R Training of Trainers
 - 2) Pass the written post test
 - 3) Submit a LSI-R video for review
 - 4) Complete audits with a certified trainer
 - bb. Quality Assurance Standards
 - 1) LSI-R trainers or Quality Assurance representatives will review an additional 5 LSI-Rs for those that have been certified to use the LSI-R tool. If they are considered "Proficient" they will be placed on a maintenance schedule.
 - 2) The maintenance schedule shall consist of one full LSI-R review per officer every six months.
 - 3) Proficiency is defined as follows:
 - aaa. Not technical errors are found in 5 full LSI-R reviews.
 - bbb. No more than 3 scoring errors in 5 consecutive reviews.
 - ccc. The officer consistently provides enough documentation/information that supports the answers in the assessment.
- b. Districts shall develop policy and procedures to ensure that a comprehensive case management review is conducted, using the Case Audit Review form. A minimum of one full review per officer per month shall be conducted by the supervisor or designee. This review shall occur sixty - ninety days after case assignment for residential cases and six – eight months after case assignment for field cases.

Note: A case file content audit may be conducted in accordance with local district policy.

B. Training

1. New Staff Training. New case management and supervisory staff shall successfully complete the requirements of the five-day counselor track within the first year of service. This training will include proper scoring of the LSI-R, interviewing skills which includes an introduction to motivational interviewing and the stages of change model, responsiveness and intervention, case planning and negotiation. Note: In order to be fully certified to use the LSI-R, case management staff must satisfactorily complete both the initial training and the follow-up training.
2. LSI-R Follow-Up/Booster Training. LSI-R follow up sessions will be held three to six months after initial training. In order to attend this training, case management staff must complete a minimum of six LSI-R interviews with one of those being audio or videotaped. Local trainers will review the LSI-R interviews and tapes prior to the follow-up training. Supervisors will be responsible for tracking the completion of the two-step process for certified use of the LSI-R. Booster sessions will be held within each jurisdiction as determined by the LSI-R quality assurance committee.
3. Supervisor Quality Assurance Training/Booster Sessions. Supervisors and designated staff shall receive ongoing training in the areas of quality assurance, auditing, the use of the LSI-R in case management, effective intervention strategies using risk, need, and responsiveness principles.

B. Training – (continued)

4. Effective Correctional Interventions Training. Additional training will be provided for existing employees needing training in the following areas:
 - a. Supervision by Responsivity. Staff shall learn to use the CMC and/or Jesness and the Stage of Change Model to best plan interventions based on risk, need, and responsivity principles, which include two tracks. The first track is aimed primarily at Residential Probation/Parole Officers, Field Probation/Parole Officers, Community Treatment Coordinators, TASC Liaisons, and other treatment providers. The second track will provide information specific to Residential Officers and others in related positions.
 - b. Motivational Interviewing. Staff who have knowledge of the basic principles of supervision by responsivity shall complete this training, which focuses on brief counseling, advanced interviewing skills and using the Stage of Change Model when planning interventions with offenders. This training is open to all interested staff, but aimed primarily at Residential Probation/Parole Officers, Field Probation/Parole Officers, Community Treatment Coordinators, TASC liaisons, and other positions that offer counseling services.

C. Transfer Cases – At the time of in-state transfer, each District shall ensure that the following is entered into ICON or provide copies of the following information as applicable, to the receiving officer/unit institution to include backup information such as:

1. Interview Guide and scoring form for CMC and LSI-R
2. Jesness Report
3. Outsourced Assessments

How Do You Know If the Risk Assessment Instrument Works?

*Kelly Dedel Johnson
and
Patricia L. Hardyman*

By design, risk assessment instruments are easy to use: rate an offender on a small number of items, add up the score, check the scale, and identify whether the offender is low-, medium-, or high-risk. Easy! Fill out the form on a large number of offenders, and you can make impressive-looking charts as to the number of offenders in each risk group and do complex workload computations to estimate the number of probation/parole officers needed to manage the offender population.

But . . . how do you know if the instrument actually works? That is, how do you know if the offender who scored as high-risk really requires the intensive and costly interventions you've designed to mitigate the threat he or she poses to community safety? Conversely, how do you know if the offender who scored as low-risk—and who is therefore receiving only minimal levels of supervision—really poses very little threat to public safety? What if the instrument is wrong, and the offender who scored as low-risk will actually continue to victimize the community, given the low levels of service and supervision he is receiving? How can you be sure the instrument actually works?

What Does Validation Mean, and Why Is It Necessary?

The decision to use a risk assessment instrument isn't as easy as just pulling one off the shelf. It must be validated so that you are confident that the risk classification suggested by the instrument for a particular offender is an accurate representation of his or her risk to public safety. "Validation" is a research term that represents several common-sense features of an instrument. If these features are present, the instrument is said to be "valid."

- ◆ First, a valid instrument identifies discrete groups of offenders who pose different levels of risks to public safety. The level of risk is reflected in group recidivism rates, which refer to the portion of the group that experiences at least one failure (e.g., re-arrest, re-conviction) during a specified follow-up period. The group of low-risk offenders should have a statistically significant lower rate of recidivism than the group of high-risk offenders (i.e., approximately 30 percentage point difference between failure rates of the low- and high-risk groups).
- ◆ Second, an instrument cannot be considered valid if it is not reliable. There are two types of reliability: inter-rater and intra-rater reliability. Inter-rater reliability means that two different staff members applying the instrument to the same offender will reach the same score and risk classification. Intra-

rater reliability refers to whether the same rater will obtain the same score and risk classification with repeated assessments of the same offender, given no changes in the circumstances of the offender. If the instrument is not reliable, the risk classification assigned to the offender (and, consequently, the level of supervision he or she receives) varies depending on who completed the form or when it was completed.

Reliability needs to be established before an instrument's validity is tested to ensure the integrity of the risk classifications. Reliability is often difficult to achieve, particularly when risk instruments include items that are somewhat subjective, that are poorly defined, or that require information that is difficult to access.

- ◆ Third, the instrument must be fair to all offender subpopulations. In particular, the instrument should assess women and racial minorities equitably, ensuring that they are subjected to supervision that is commensurate with their actual levels of risk to public safety.
- ◆ Finally, the instrument should be practical, efficient, and simple to implement. Instruments that are too complicated or too time-consuming to complete often suffer from inadequate reliability, and thus have little utility to staff.

Validating a risk instrument and ensuring its reliability, equity, and utility are serious undertakings, and they are essential for sound supervision practices. Differences in offender characteristics, laws, agency policies, and local supervision conditions mean that an instrument that creates accurate risk classifications in one jurisdiction won't necessarily work well in another. A number of contextual factors can also suggest that a validation effort is needed, including changes in the characteristics of the offender population (such as average age or length of sentence), new sentencing legislation, or budget cuts and reductions in programs and services. Further, experience has shown that risk instruments do not always work equally well for different offender subpopulations (such as women, sex offenders, or mentally ill offenders).

Finally, validating an instrument is a key strategy to improve staff buy-in, instill public confidence in the effectiveness of community corrections, and defend the agency's decision-making process in the event of an unfortunate, high-profile crime involving an offender on supervision.

How Do You Get Started?

Agencies need to make a number of decisions prior to undertaking a validation study. First, "recidivism" must be defined for use as an outcome measure. Risk assessment instruments group offenders according to their risk to public safety. This risk can take several forms: risk of a subsequent arrest, risk of a subsequent conviction, or risk of a return to jail or prison. Choosing among these various

measures of recidivism is an essential first step, as it will determine what data need to be collected.

There are compelling reasons for selecting either re-arrest, re-conviction, or re-incarceration as a measure of recidivism, but there are disadvantages to each choice as well. Variations in case processing time, completeness and availability of data, prosecutorial and plea bargaining practices, and the reliance on revocation in response to offender non-compliance should be considered for their impact on each potential measure of recidivism. Generally speaking, re-arrest and re-conviction both provide relatively accurate measures of harm to the community, while re-incarceration rates can be affected by non-compliance with technical conditions of supervision rather than new criminal behavior.

It is important to recognize that the selection of an outcome measure often limits the utility of the instrument for other purposes. For example, validating an instrument using re-arrest as the outcome measure means that the instrument may not be able to classify offenders according to their likelihood of re-conviction for a violent offense. It is therefore essential that the choice among recidivism measures be made thoughtfully.

Testing the instrument for its ability to classify according to risk of violence has appeal, but this is difficult to accomplish. This difficulty stems in large part from the fact that acts of violence are relatively rare. These low base rates mean that it is difficult to create an instrument that produces a group with a high rate of violent re-offending and to produce groups whose rates of violent re-offense are radically different from each other. As a result, most risk instruments are validated using broad categories, such as any re-arrest, or any felony re-arrest.

Another part of deciding on an outcome measure involves specifying the follow-up period that will be used, i.e., the risk that an offender will be re-arrested, re-convicted, or re-incarcerated during what length of time following the assessment. Most validation studies use a follow-up period of at least 12 months, and some extend as far as 36 months.

Tolerance for error also is an important consideration. Risk assessments are vulnerable to two main types of error: false positives (the instrument suggests that an offender will recidivate, but he or she does not) and false negatives (the instrument suggests the offender will not recidivate, but he or she does). Most jurisdictions try to minimize the false negatives produced by an instrument by adjusting the “cut” points of the scale to group more offenders into higher-risk categories. This subjects more offenders to higher levels of supervision and services. Ultimately, a jurisdiction’s tolerance for error, and the resulting adjustments to scale cut-points, are inextricably linked to the conservation or expenditure of supervision resources.

A final consideration is the agency’s readiness and commitment to modify its risk assessment process. The tasks of validation and implementing changes to the

current process are time-consuming and require substantial agency resources. If an agency has sufficient resources and staff to complete the validation, but lacks the commitment to change policies and procedures, the initiative should not proceed because it would waste limited resources and negatively impact staff morale and future willingness to participate in validation efforts.

What Are the Key Steps of a Validation Study?

The validation process includes four basic steps: reviewing the current risk assessment system and setting goals, conducting a detailed analysis of the risk assessment, developing an implementation plan for the new or revised system, and documenting the validation effort.

Step 1—Review the current system. A review of the existing system must examine the current risk assessment policies, practices, and issues; the positive and negative trends associated with these policies and practices; and the goals of the validation study. Specifying the goals of the validation is the most critical and the most difficult task. It requires the agency to define the specific problem(s) that will be addressed, to set realistic goals, and to define measurable objectives for the validation.

During the early stages of the study, the following information should be compiled and reviewed:

- ◆ Written risk assessment policies and procedures;
- ◆ Agency annual reports;
- ◆ Current risk assessment instruments;
- ◆ Current automated management reports, including relevant statistics regarding the risk assessment system;
- ◆ Agency staffing and budget; and
- ◆ Any recently enacted or pending legislation or administrative policies that may impact risk assessment or supervision practices.

In addition to reviewing the formal documentation of the system, the mechanics of the risk assessment process should also be considered by interviewing central office and line staff to understand their perceptions of the current risk assessment system and the issues that are of concern. It may not be possible to interview all or even a majority of the staff, so it will be necessary to carefully sample staff or conduct focus group meetings to ensure that a broad range of perspectives is captured. The interviews should be augmented by reviewing a small random sample of recently completed risk assessment instruments and the case files or information system screens used to score the instruments.

Step 2. Analyze the risk assessment system. Regardless of whether the agency has decided to develop a new system, to modify the current instruments, or simply to validate the current system, the following steps are required.

- ◆ **Draw representative samples of key offender populations.** The specific sampling procedures will need to be tailored to the agency's information system capabilities, supervision populations, and goals of the validation effort. Separate random samples of males and females will be needed, that consider their respective average daily population, number of admissions per year, and average length of supervision, to allow for separate analyses of these populations. In addition, stratification or over-sampling of special populations may be necessary. If there are concerns about the validity of the instruments for offenders with mental health problems, for example, this population may need to be over-sampled to ensure an adequate number of cases for statistical analysis. The size of the samples required for the statistical analyses should be adjusted according to the average daily population of the jurisdiction. At a minimum, 300 initial and 300 reassessment instruments should be completed for both male and female offenders, for a total of 1,200 cases.

- ◆ **Compile the data.** Depending on the sophistication, reliability, and accuracy of the data stored in the agency's automated information system, the information system or research staff will need to generate electronic data files regarding the sampled offenders' criminal history, demographics, and history of technical violations. A detailed request identifying the specific data to be included in the electronic files is critical to avoid misunderstandings and spurious conclusions. To ensure the accuracy of the data, an independent reviewer should audit any manually collected data to clarify inconsistencies and eliminate missing data.

- ◆ **Analyze the data.** Risk factors, scale cut points, and override factors need to be assessed to determine if they are valid and reliable for identifying offenders who pose a threat to public safety. It is important to conduct separate analyses by gender to ensure that the system is appropriate for both the male and female populations. Additional analyses can indicate whether separate instruments, scales, or risk factors are required for special populations.

At a minimum, the process should include the following statistical analyses:

- Examining demographic and offense characteristics of the samples and the agency's offender populations. These data describe the samples and the total offender population to ensure that the samples are representative.

- Reviewing frequency distributions, mean number of arrests/convictions/technical violations, and percent of offenders who successfully completed the follow-up period for the initial and reassessment risk

factors, separated by gender. These analyses provide insight as to the number of offenders falling within the respective categories of the risk factors. For example, the mean number of arrests per risk factor helps to identify risk categories that create distinct groups of offenders and to identify where further refinement of the risk factors and/or categories may be necessary.

- Reviewing the distribution of the scored risk levels and the mandatory and discretionary override factors. Analysts should examine the number of cases scoring within the risk levels based solely on their numerical points, along with the number of offenders whose risk level is derived from mandatory or discretionary overrides.
- Conducting a stepwise multiple regression analysis of the risk factors, the selected recidivism measure (re-arrests, re-convictions, technical violations, or incarceration), the total risk score, the scored risk level, and the final risk level. A stepwise regression analysis shows the contribution of the respective risk factors to the total score. Factors that are not statistically associated with the total score or supervision outcome should be refined or deleted from the instrument.
- Developing a correlation matrix. A correlation matrix is critical to assess the strength and direction of the relationships among the risk factors and the selected recidivism measure, total risk score, scored risk level, and final risk level. Special attention should be paid to the relationships among the risk factors to determine if any are duplicative or generate spurious relationships.
- Determining the risk scale cut points. Designating the cut points for the risk scale is a multi-step process. First, consider the rate of recidivism per total score to identify natural breaks in the distribution of cases. A significant increase in the number of arrests, for example, would suggest a shift from minimum to medium risk. These natural breaks should be further examined with an analysis of variance.
- Analyzing variance. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) is important to determine if the risk levels derived from the risk scale are statistically distinct. The ANOVA asks whether the offenders who scored at different risk levels actually represent a distinct group of offenders with respect to their risk of recidivism. If the analysis indicates substantial overlap between the respective risk levels (for example, if offenders who score as minimum do not differ statistically in their recidivism from those who score as medium), the risk scale is not valid. The total risk score may be statistically correlated with recidivism and thus be a valid indicator of the offender's risk, but if the risk scale does not create statistically distinct groups, the system is invalid because it does not

provide the decision-maker with accurate information about how to supervise the offender.

Step 3: Develop a comprehensive implementation plan. The agency's action plan for implementation must consider staffing; training; impact of any changes on key stakeholders; revisions to the information system screens, database, software, etc.; data required to monitor the system; and the estimated fiscal costs associated with implementation. An often overlooked but critical element of the action plan is system automation. Regardless of how easy the instruments are to score, automation ultimately is essential to enhance reliability, minimize staff workload, and facilitate ongoing monitoring of the system. The action plan should also include goals, objectives, and specific time lines for implementing any changes to the system.

Step 4: Document the validation effort. At the close of the validation study, the agency should prepare a written report documenting the development and evolution of the risk assessment system, the current validation process, and results. The report should be written in non-technical language and distributed to administrative, supervisory, and line staff. It should also provide baseline data for tracking any modifications to the system and assessing the impact of these changes.

Where Can We Get Help?

A validation effort is a technical endeavor requiring statistical expertise. This expertise is rarely available in-house, particularly among smaller jurisdictions. Fortunately, resources are available to assist agency administrators with this critical component of objective risk assessment. The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) offers short-term technical assistance that provides expertise to help plan a validation process.

Assistance can be maximized when agencies are able to commit staff resources to the task of manual data collection or can limit the scope of the specific research questions. Although time-consuming and resource-intensive, undertaking a validation study fortifies an overall supervision strategy by helping the agency make resource allocation decisions based on a valid risk assessment. ■

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Quality Case Management Through Integrated Use of Assessment Data

In recent years corrections professionals have been, to their good fortune, the recipients of a great many research results on assessment tools and application strategies related to the case management of offenders. This research is generally being referred to as the “what works” literature. In addition, corrections has also been looking to other professions for material to integrate into case management. The challenge has been to assimilate all these concepts into an integrated approach to offender case management.

This article will not address these concepts in detail; much has been written about them already. Instead, I focus here on clarifying the application of those concepts to correctional case management.

Creating Agency-Wide Commitment

The initial steps in applying the research are for corrections agencies to embrace these new ideas, gather staff buy-in, train staff, and implement the new approaches. The agency must then ensure that staff can take the new approaches from training to application.

The methods by which agencies approach this task is varied, I am sure, but technology has helped at least two jurisdictions accomplish this task. In the Sixth Judicial District of Iowa, located in southeast Iowa, the challenge has been met by developing the “Matrix.” Our agency had become familiar with the “what works” material through training and by using the Level of Service Inventory–Revised (LSI-R), but the amount of information was overwhelming to staff. The Matrix is an automated tool that synthesizes data from various actuarial risk assessment tools plus profiles from assessments such as the Client Management Classification (CMC) or Jesness Inventory instruments. The Matrix generates placement of an offender on both a risk (control) and a need (treatment) axis; each specific placement involves different strategies, resources, and sanctions, all determined by the risk and need of the offender.

I will discuss the Matrix later, but I mention it here to illustrate an important point: effective case management begins when all staff, top to bottom, feel connected to the mission, vision, and guiding principles of the agency and understand that staff are an important part of the agency. In developing the Matrix, a diagonal slice of the agency was assembled to give input into the process. Administrators were members of the team; their contributions were to give support and guidance but, more importantly, to stay out of the way and let the process

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happen. When we completed the Matrix, there was little opposition from staff, as they had been an integral part of its development.

The importance of staff training cannot be understated, as it is crucial to successful case management. The staff must have a fundamental knowledge of the principles of effective correctional intervention in order to apply them in case management. Once the initial training is completed, case management implementation can begin.

Understanding the Offender

The principles of effective correctional intervention indicate that the most effective use of resources is to target your highest-risk offenders. Agencies should use prescreening assessments to eliminate and divert lower-risk offenders. In Iowa, the Iowa Risk Classification assessment (modeled after the Wisconsin Risk Assessment) performs this crucial first step in the process. Maryland's system also uses a prescreening tool for this purpose, as discussed on page 29. Case management efforts need to be directed to the highest-risk offenders; lower-risk offenders are best managed by low-risk case managers and banked caseloads.

Good case management is an integrated system that starts at the assessment interview. The assessment interview is critical in setting the tone for the offender's investment in the case management process. For it to be effective, staff must change their approach to conducting an interview. Many staff are familiar and comfortable with the "interrogation interview"—however, to discover the offender's "reality" and life situation, staff must use motivational interviewing techniques and suspend judgment while gaining insight into how the offender thinks and acts. It is also important to remember the case management plan while interviewing an offender and to be sure to cover all areas that are critical for completing a case management plan.

For example, to understand the offender's pattern of behavior, it is important to know what led up to the offense(s), not just the date of the charge and the disposition of the case. If you are going to change behavior, you must have a clear understanding of when the problem behavior is most likely to occur and when the offender is likely to be most vulnerable. Two offenders may have committed the same crime but for very different reasons; exploring the motivation or need being met by the behavior is a very important aspect of the case management interview. In many ways, this step is analogous to the ABC's (Antecedents, Behavior, and Consequences) of relapse prevention strategies.

In addition to conducting actuarial risk assessments, it is important to obtain data on personality traits, either by performing assessments or gathering data from outside sources. Examples of these assessments include the CMC and the Jesness Inventory. There are a multitude of other assessments, such as IQ tests, the Criminal Sentiments Scale, and Stages of Change, which also reveal pertinent information about an offender. Gathering this information directly or from collateral sources is important in developing programming tailored to the characteris-

tics of the offender. Andrews and Bonta (1994) outline the need to develop interventions and programming in a style and mode that is consistent with the ability and learning style of the offender in order to maximize the effectiveness of the programming; this is known as the “responsivity principle.”

Creating the Supervision Plan

Once the assessments have been completed, the case management plan can be developed. The staff person needs to reflect back to the assessments and use the offender’s descriptions of his circumstances and behaviors to design a plan that addresses the factors contributing to the problematic behavior. It is important that the case management plan stress the application of new techniques and skills learned in the appropriate programs. To have the offender participate in cognitive programming is one thing, but having the offender apply what he has learned in programming to real-life situations should be the goal, when looking to long-term behavior change.

The format of the supervision plan can vary, as long as both agent and offender view the plan as a mutually agreed-upon document. According to motivational speaker and author Brian Tracey, “The single most important difference between successful and unsuccessful plans is whether or not they are written down by the actor.”

Using Technology to Leverage Data

The Matrix system developed by the Iowa Sixth Judicial District assists staff in pulling all the results of the various assessments together and then using the results to formulate a case management process. The Matrix will accept input from various risk assessments, including the LSI-R and specialized assessments like the Jesness. (For details, see Gary Hinzman, “The Matrix: Matching the Offender With Treatment Resources,” *Topics in Community Corrections* 1999.)

Additional specialized assessments, including substance abuse evaluations, are also factored into the offender’s Matrix placement. Offenders are plotted on the risk and need axes based on the results of the assessment materials entered into the matrix. The scores are weighted and averaged with one another. If the assessment indicates a high score, its impact on the axis placement will be greater. Each entry item affects one axis or both, depending on the item. Once the scores are plotted on the Matrix, the staff user has a menu of options from which to choose in developing a case management plan. The Matrix provides a profile of the offender, including the Jesness I Level and sub-type, supervision strategies, interventions (programming), and sanctions.

A similar tool, the Maryland Offender Case planning Software for Empowerment (MOCSE), has been developed by the state of Maryland for use in the Proactive Community Supervision Program. MOCSE uses many of the same assessment tools as the Matrix and also incorporates the principles of effective correctional supervision. The system produces a supervision plan and does an excellent job of providing feedback to the staff and offender on “change stage.”

Both the Matrix and MOCSE do a wonderful job of “synthesizing” all the assessment information and graphically displaying the results in an organized and meaningful way. These tools allow staff to use the information to design a consistent case management plan based on risk, needs, and responsivity principles. Technology tools like the Matrix and MOCSE function as quality control mechanisms in that they guide users in matching resources and programming that are consistent with the principles of effective correctional intervention. Both also function as training tools for new staff.

Clinical review is another crucial aspect of implementing effective correctional interventions. In Iowa’s Sixth District, an agent and a supervisor staff each case while preparing reports for the court or completing the case management plan. The Matrix provides common ground and gets all parties looking at the same information.

Measuring Outcomes

Periodic reassessments of offenders can be one indicator of the impact of interventions. If the interventions are in keeping with the responsivity principle, success rates should be high. Maryland’s MOCSE program provides administrators and front-line users with ongoing progress reports on court-ordered requirements. Iowa’s Matrix system works similarly with the state’s database system to track the success rates of offenders receiving correctional interventions.

Both Maryland and Iowa also do case audit reviews to maintain quality control. Ongoing training, certifications, and use of the Correctional Program Assessment Inventory (CPAI) are other forms of quality control used in Iowa.

Managing offenders, from initial assessment to positive completion of correctional programming, must incorporate the principles of effective correctional intervention. Agencies can help their staff by developing software and computer programs that integrate these principles, and organize, support, and track outcomes for ongoing program development. ■

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From “Counting Heads” to Measuring Work: A Risk Control Model

Despite 30 years of ever-improving knowledge about risk and needs assessment, growing attention to dynamic risk factors (aka criminogenic needs) as targets for intervention, and the increasing application of risk and needs assessment tools in community corrections, the field’s practitioners and leaders continue to quantify their human resource needs in terms of caseload size. Whether the agency standard is 50, 60, or 100 offenders per officer, line staff and managers continue to measure workload by these numbers alone. Budgets are created and positions are allocated based on the number of offenders, as though each offender required the same level of officer time, case management, and intervention as every other offender.

When caseload size is the measure, then we are counting heads and drawing simple conclusions about the type of work that is required to safely manage those “heads.” In contrast, when workload is the measure, we are defining and quantifying the types of activities that represent supervision and case management. We can then create system-wide standards for these activities and adjust case-by-case expectations according to assessments of risk to re-offend. We can better reach the ultimate goal of managing offender risk according to the actual risk the offender presents to the community.

Why Workload Is Key

The time invested in controlling risk factors in a high-risk offender should be greater than the time needed to control risk factors in an offender who has a very low risk to re-offend. Added hours of officer time will not prevent crimes that were not going to be committed in the first place, and we know very low-risk offenders are not likely to re-offend. Thus, the officer’s time should be prioritized toward those who are more likely to commit a crime.

The time investment becomes the measure of work—the workload—attached to a particular type of offender. A caseload of very high-risk individuals creates many more hours of work than a caseload of low-risk offenders. A full-time workload might consist of 30 high-risk offenders or 150 low-risk offenders, assuming they are supervised differently according to their risk to re-offend.

The workload approach requires us to accurately measure an offender’s risk to re-offend. At this point in time, it has been well established that we can accurately measure risk. The approach also demands that we define the activities involved in providing a high quality of supervision, and that we define different activities for higher-risk than for lower-risk offenders. Implementing the approach requires that

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we take into account the organizational challenges inherent in moving from quantifying work in a caseload paradigm to doing so in a workload paradigm.

Sorting Offenders

Offender assessment is only important if it is used to differentiate and individualize supervision approaches. If each offender is to be supervised in the same way, then we do not need to do an assessment, and measuring work by counting heads makes sense. Each person under supervision is treated in a similar way, and so the workload is the same regardless of individual factors.

On the other hand, assessing and then targeting resources toward higher-risk offenders is a proven and research-based practice to reduce recidivism. As the field of community corrections moves forward in implementing research-based practices to improve effectiveness, using a workload model to understand staffing needs is a logical step.

Defining Case Management Activities

In order to develop a workload model, an agency must first define the activities that are desired for the supervision of offenders at different risk levels. Desired activities can also be defined for supervising particular types of offenders, such as sex offenders, domestic violence perpetrators, women offenders, and so on. The community corrections organization must become very specific about these expectations so that it will be clear if a case is being managed in the defined manner.

Next, the agency must develop some understanding of the time involved in managing a case according to the quality standards and activities it has defined. This can be accomplished in at least two ways.

- ◆ The quicker method of determining workload uses a group of “experts” who estimate the time it should take to carry out the activities prescribed for each risk level. That time estimate will determine the “work” involved in managing cases at different risk levels. An officer has a limited amount of time to do casework each month, and this must also be estimated. The number of officer hours available for casework, compared to the estimated hours needed to do quality-oriented and differential casework, provides a way of assigning one full-time workload to one full-time officer.

- ◆ A second way to determine workload is through a time study. Once the agency’s quality standards have been defined, cases that are managed according to those standards can be examined to determine how much officer time is involved in doing the job. The same time study can also provide a more exact measure of the officer time actually available for supervision, taking into account other non-supervision-related activities, such as training and meetings. Then, as in the first method, the time study verifies the number of hours available for casework and the hours needed to do quality-oriented and differential casework for particular types of offenders. It thus provides a

way of assigning one full-time workload to one full-time officer.

Either of these methods results in a time value assigned to a case based on risk to re-offend, expected casework activities, and officer time. For example, it might take 4 hours or more per month to manage a high- or medium-risk offender according to the agency's standards, compared to 1 hour or less to manage a low-risk offender. The number of cases that constitute a full-time workload, then, is not a static number, but a function of the risk profile of those who are being supervised by officer and the hours involved in managing each case. Two officers may have the same workload but be responsible for a different number of cases, because the risk profile is different.

Organizational Challenges

The approach that has been described sounds like a very logical and simple process based upon the best practices in our field. However, managers implementing this type of workload measurement in community corrections organizations will face several challenges.

- ◆ Leaders implementing this model should consider the policy and budget implications of a workload formula before starting the process. If budget or practice changes will result from this process, stakeholders from those areas need to be informed and, if possible, supportive at the onset. If the expectations for supervision are set in such a way that many more officer positions would be required and there is no budget for those positions, then the expectations must be adjusted.
- ◆ The process may require the support of judges or political and policy leaders. If so, those leaders should be a part of the decision to implement this change. Beginning the process by educating all stakeholders about the basis for these changes can bring that support along.
- ◆ It is often difficult to create very specific expectations for each type of caseload. Probation and parole supervision can be a very fluid process, and among the best practitioners in any organization, there can be disagreement about what constitutes "good practice" with each type of offender. Also, officers often are accustomed to creating their own methods to manage cases rather than having the organization define good casework. For many officers, creating their own standards for work is a part of the appeal of the job. The nature of the work requires practitioners who think and act independently, and a process of setting agency standards can potentially become a battleground for that independence. If staff are not convinced that the standards make sense, they will not be fully implemented. Leadership can start by acknowledging this loss of control directly and educating staff about why standards are an important part of a best practices-based system.
- ◆ Staff may also see that standards can address other inequities, such as performance problems or lack of staff/supervision accountability, and they

can be brought into the process of setting the casework standards. Staff and management teams can research the literature and create recommended standards for their organization. The staff involvement process must include strong management leadership, clear rules for decision-making, and a thorough grounding in the theory of community corrections practice in order to arrive at a quality product.

- ◆ Staff can have strong reactions to a shift to workload vs. counting heads. Most of our agencies' staff are familiar with and comfortable with the model of counting numbers of offenders. They may be very concerned about issues of workload equity and fairness in a move to the new model. Though staff involvement in the plan for the shift helps gain acceptance for change, some officers will never be convinced that the new system is "fair." Some middle managers may not be supportive of the move, either. Without "buy-in" by the middle manager, standards might be identified but never fully implemented at the line staff level. Organizations may also need to increase case auditing and other quality assurance measures to monitor the implementation of the standards. Leaders need to gain their middle managers' support.
- ◆ Some organizations have had limited caseloads for special populations for a long time. These caseloads may not have had clearly defined expectations, however. In some organizations, it might be easiest to start by developing a clearer definition of the workload standards for these specialized caseloads and then move to the generic caseloads.

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Making Change Happen

These are exciting and challenging times in our field. As we move from theory about evidence-based practices to implementation of those practices in our work, we are pushing forward changes that can increase our success with offenders and increase public safety in our communities. Changing workload measurement in our probation and parole systems can be the next step in this process. ■

Automating Offender Risk Assessment

Parole officer Sandy Smith arrives at the office bright and early, fires up the computer, pours a cup of coffee, and sits down to begin the day by checking e-mail. Among the in-box items is one titled “Risk Increase.” Opening the mail, the officer finds a notice that parolee Bob Summers’s supervision risk has crossed a threshold that moves him from the standard to the high level of supervision. His risk of re-arrest for a new felony is now over 60%. Officer Smith reads on to see that Summers recently moved a third time, causing the risk score increase. While the officer already knew about the residence change, the e-mail is an alert to the cumulative effects of this and other events during Summers’s time on parole. Acquiring this information needs no action from the parole officer. Each morning, if a parolee’s risk to re-offend has risen or fallen across a pre-determined threshold, the parole officer receives an e-mail that lists the factors affecting the risk score.

This scene depicts a now-common activity among Georgia’s parole officers. In 2003 the Georgia Parole Board implemented an automated, actuarial risk assessment that calculates an initial risk score at the time of release from prison. The system then automatically updates risk changes daily for each of the 21,000 parolees currently on supervision. Officer Smith now knows not only who is top priority for immediate attention but also the behaviors that should be the focus of the next interactions with the offender, family members, and treatment providers.

The Georgia Parolee Risk Assessment instrument is based on research conducted on more than 6,000 Georgia parolees who completed supervision in 2001. The instrument’s ability to predict that a parolee will commit a new felony equals or exceeds the published predictive ability of risk instruments currently on the market.

This article reviews the challenges of developing, implementing, and maintaining an automated risk assessment. Hardware and software are purposely not discussed. The process begins with selecting the right work team, then moves to thinking through what information is to be collected and how, and ends with testing and refining the system with user feedback. We also briefly discuss how automated assessment helps align Georgia Parole’s Results Driven Supervision model with evidence-based practices in community supervision.

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Beginning with FLOID

The impetus for developing an automated risk assessment tool began in 1997 when the Parole Board adopted Results Driven Supervision (RDS) and determined it needed a way to quantify and validate that the model was being used. The product of this work is FLOID, the Field Log of Interaction Data, a computerized case management system.

FLOID development began by creating a team that consisted of line parole officers and managers, central office managers, research staff, and programmers. Their charge was to replace paper field notebooks with an electronic tool to record and document supervision activities.

- ◆ Parole officers wanted an easy-to-use tool that documented every action taken on a case.
- ◆ Managers needed immediate access to information for identifying cases that might be problematic, plus summary statistics on each officer's caseload to end the time-consuming and tedious manual counting required for monthly reports.
- ◆ Program, research, and evaluation staff wanted everything possible to be collected as data.

As a result, we designed the initial system with extensive check boxes, pick lists, defined fields, and other schema for quick data entry and accurate data collection.

In *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Steven Covey's second habit is "Begin with the end in mind." We found this good advice to follow as we developed our case management tool. While the initial goals expressed by each team participant were important, developing the right tool that met all of our envisioned future needs required more thought and collaboration.

In discussions with senior managers we found that they wanted far more than an automated way to count work activities. The case management system had to be a tool to manage work processes while also providing the data to answer critical questions about our effectiveness at reducing offender risk to the community—Which programs work? What supervision activities, if any, impact parolee behavior? How quickly are violations being addressed by parole officers? Are parole officers paying attention to the right activities? Where is supervision most effective and why?

These discussions also included risk assessment. In 1996, parole officers were using a paper-based supervision risk assessment that was time-consuming to score and based on static risk factors—offender attributes that could not be changed, such as age, number of prior incarcerations, and offense type. Reassessment consisted of combining these static factors with the parole officer's opinions

about the parolee's progress. The considerable effort required to complete the form diverted time from surveillance and supervision.

Risk management had become a workload issue. It was clear that a primary standard for the new computerized case management system was to improve the efficiency and accuracy of risk assessment.

Focusing on Data Quality

Identifying the information that had to be captured in the case management system was the key to standardizing documentation, making information more useful, answering important management and quality assurance questions about effectiveness, and increasing the validity and reliability of offender risk prediction. Once we identified the needed information, the system had to be designed to accommodate collecting it in the right way, primarily as data. And, while computers can collate, count, and compare interactions when the information is collected in a structured data format, the system also needed to accept open text from parole officers to provide a context for understanding the data.

Soon after the development team created and implemented the test version of FLOID, we generated our first sample reports. These initial reports brought to light other factors that are as important as collecting information in the right format. Information had to be entered consistently and accurately. Line staff and supervisors had to be trained and retrained on the definition of data items and where to enter information.

- ◆ One of our first management reports counted the use of various interaction types, which could include drug tests, program attendance, employment verification, etc. Much to our chagrin, we found that one interaction type, "Other," was most frequently selected. It turned out that there were so many interaction types, officers who were unable to quickly find the one they wanted simply checked "Other." "Other" is now rarely found in FLOID.
- ◆ Another early system flag related to offender residence data. The new FLOID reports indicated that parolees often had multiple addresses. Officers added new records to the system each time they made a slight change to an address, such as adding the ZIP code. Conversely, in some cases officers edited existing residence records when a parolee moved to a new address; this prevented the system from knowing that the parolee had actually moved. As will be seen later, the actuarial risk analysis found that residence changes are a key risk factor, so correcting these errors proved to be valuable later on.

Reviewing these early reports helped us to determine that a system not designed for edit-checking data would quickly undermine data quality. The address issue also highlighted the importance of standardized data definitions, concrete explanations of data entry processes, and the need to make data entry better fit the "natural" decisions and work processes of parole officers.

To improve system data quality, we increased staff training time and assigned the more computer-literate officers as mentors to work closely with other staff. We also enlisted their help as a technical support team.

We also built into the data entry screens a series of edit checks for incomplete information. These changes improved the overall accuracy and quality of data. Some information that had been originally included at the request of field staff and researchers was eliminated to streamline the tool. Researchers and program evaluation staff learned that time restrictions did not permit officers to enter every piece of “desirable” information; some compromises were necessary. Data quality further improved as we created and refined management reports that gave back to officers and managers, in a report useful to them, the data they were entering.

Georgia Parole’s 10 Keys to Creating the Most Useful Automated Case Management Systems

- ◆ Begin with the end in mind.
- ◆ Users, managers, researchers, and programmers must work as a team.
- ◆ Conduct user testing and collect feedback at each step.
- ◆ Collect information as data, not text.
- ◆ All data must be a by-product of the natural decision-making and documentation process.
- ◆ There is a limit to the number of different data items that can be collected. Choose carefully!
- ◆ Train; collect feedback. Train; collect feedback. Train. . .
- ◆ Include edit checks as part of data entry.
- ◆ Provide data back to front line staff as useful reports as quickly as possible.
- ◆ Enter data one time — Use many times.

Throughout this process, we identified several keys for creating the most useful case management systems (see box).

Implementing the Risk Assessment Component

Collecting data and preparing it for analysis are often the most time-consuming and tedious processes in creating a user-friendly and accurate risk instrument. The next step is statistically analyzing the data.

Whether or not an agency uses an off-the-shelf risk assessment instrument, developing local norms is necessary to accurately interpret the instrument’s results. The norming process requires administering the instrument to a sufficient number of offenders and then comparing their scores with the offenders’ actual outcomes. If designed with the end—risk assessment—in mind, an automated case management system can use the agency’s

existing data to create and norm a risk instrument that is as accurate and reliable as any commercial product.

The Georgia Parolee Risk Assessment instrument was designed using the same relatively simple, straightforward logic and professionally agreed-upon statistical techniques as commercially available products for predicting a future event or behavior. The risk instrument development process begins with accumulating a large set of data on the offender population, including information on many variables that theoretically may predict the occurrence or non-occurrence of committing a crime.

The most challenging step in developing a risk instrument is collecting a sufficiently broad range of information and preparing it for analysis. In our case, the FLOID case management system was the source of the data.

The Georgia Parole Board partnered with Dr. Tammy Meredith to identify data elements, conduct the analysis, and help train field managers and staff. Early analysis of FLOID data began in 1999. By the winter of 2001, data quality had improved significantly, and the number of parolees who had completed supervision was sufficient to begin the development of a risk instrument.

Identifying predictors. Of the 6,327 parolees who had completed supervision in 2001, 48% were arrested for a new offense while under supervision. The goal of the analysis was to identify statistically significant predictors of arrest for a new offense while under parole supervision. Technical violation arrests without an accompanying new offense were excluded. The results would be used to develop an initial assessment and a reassessment instrument.

A factor is statistically significant when it is associated with those parolees who are arrested for a new offense. How frequently a factor shows up among those arrested determines how well it can predict an arrest.

Over 40 potential predictors (risk factors) identified in the data were subjected to a standard multivariate logistic regression analysis.

- ◆ The potential predictors that we examined included data captured in the Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS) by the Georgia Department of Corrections on all offenders during their stay in prison. These include factors such as demographics, offense information, criminal history, physical and mental health data, and substance abuse history.
- ◆ We also analyzed the predictive value of FLOID data, with its detailed information on the events that occurred during the community supervision period, such as residence changes, program and employment activity, violations, drug test results, and much more.

The initial risk assessment is based only on data that are known on the first day of parole supervision—that is, static factors. The study of significant predictors resulted in an initial risk instrument that includes nine static risk factors (offense type, age at sentencing, prior criminal history, prior mental health/substance abuse history, etc.).

For the reassessment, we tested all data captured during the term of supervision. This enabled the Parole Board, for the first time, to incorporate dynamic risk factors in the assessment, resulting in the ability to assess risk on an ongoing basis—even daily. The reassessment instrument includes six static and five dynamic risk factors, including the number of days employed, residence changes, drug test results, program attendance, and technical violation arrests.

System outcomes. As indicated in Figure 2, the instruments' accuracy was confirmed in testing. Both instruments predicted the arrests of two-thirds of the test group and also predicted that as risk increased, the percent of parolees arrested would correspondingly increase.

Figure 2. Percent of Georgia Parolees Arrested for a New Offense, By Assessed Risk Level

Risk Instrument	Predicted Level of Risk	Percentage of Parolees Actually Arrested
Initial Assessment (using static factors)	Low (score of 1–3)	26%
	Medium (4–6)	46%
	High (7–10)	69%
Reassessment (using static and dynamic factors)	Low (1–3)	27%
	Medium (4–6)	44%
	High (7–10)	69%

The resulting system was then used to predict the likelihood of arrest for every parolee. As expected, some were low- and others high-risk. To allocate resources and time to the highest-risk parolees, the Parole Board's management team set cut-offs for low, medium, and high risk based on the likelihood of arrest and the number of parolees in each group. The risk score for each parolee was simplified to a scale of 1 (low risk) to 10 (high risk). Management further modified supervision levels to Standard and High, with one-third of parolees in the high range.

Daily risk recalculation. Parole officers add interaction data to FLOID daily, and a new computerized risk calculation is performed each night. For example, a failed drug test entered on Tuesday will be included in a recalculation of the risk score overnight. If the resulting change in the risk score is sufficient to push the parolee above or below the predetermined "high risk threshold," the recalculation prompts the system to automatically e-mail a notice to the parole officer on Wednesday.

Automated risk reassessment was pilot-tested in selected offices during the spring of 2003, and the system was deployed statewide that summer. The fear that officers would be inundated with e-mail notifications was quickly dispelled; fewer than 20 are generated on any one day.

Synthesizing Research and Practice

Georgia's RDS model is predicated on evidence-based practices. RDS targets employment, education, substance abuse, and cognitive traits (such as criminal thinking, anger management skills, mental health issues, and sex offender thought patterns). The dynamic factors in our reassessment instrument that are predictive of new crime are also associated with all four of these targets, confirming the correctness of the RDS model and further affirming the "what works" literature.

Joan Petersilia's groundbreaking research on intensive supervision confirmed a lack of association between sheer numbers of contacts and positive supervision outcomes; Canadian researchers verified that certain types of programs reduce recidivism. However, community corrections agencies have only recently begun to document routine supervision activities in ways that permit analysis to determine which activities are most predictive of outcome. Rather than using a simple count of contacts as the measure of performance, the Georgia Parole Board system provides measurable data on the factors that are associated with improved outcomes, such as number of offenders employed, number enrolled in and attending programs, number remaining free from drug use, and number with a stable residence and personal supports.

Today, our research team continues to study the characteristics and events that influence Georgia parolees' success or failure on parole. Current research efforts focus on the sequences of events that occur during a parolee's supervision, currently averaging 2 years. The goal is to uncover—as they unfold—patterns of behavior critical to predicting failure and success, allowing the parole officer to intervene before failure occurs and to reinforce continuing progress.

It may be less important that a parolee is unemployed for 30 days than it is that he lost his job following a third drug test failure during the first 9 months of supervision. If such a pattern can be demonstrated, monitoring cases for the occurrence of predictive patterns may help parole officers get a jump-start on diverting parolees away from failure and toward successful outcomes. We are hopeful that Georgia's automated risk assessment and the study of these patterns of behavior will lead to the next generation of more accurate risk/needs assessments. ■

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Implementing an Offender Risk and Needs Assessment: An Organizational Change Process

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The information shared in this article was largely unknown to me 4 years ago. However, as Connecticut embarked on the implementation of a new risk and needs assessment tool, I was forced to re-evaluate my own beliefs concerning the role and responsibility of probation services in contributing to improved public safety. Over the past few years, I have studied and implemented a number of correctional models based on different correctional principles and strategies. Whether an agency embraces restorative justice, community justice, “broken windows,” evidence-based practice, or an integrated model, I have come to believe that the first step needed to effectively change the behavior of the offenders under our supervision is to be willing to change ourselves.

Today the public is beginning to demand that a corrections agency reach beyond its jurisdiction over an offender to meet its public safety responsibility. This public expectation requires that we embrace the philosophy that offenders can change. We can no longer continue offender supervision practices that are not supported by either the existing evidence of the causes of crime or the knowledge of which correctional programs and strategies have had the greatest success in changing offender behavior. Therefore, to enhance the safety of our communities, we must adopt evidence-based principles of offender supervision and treatment, principles that have clearly been proven to reduce offender recidivism.

Focusing the Use of Resources

The first, foundational principle for reducing offender recidivism is to assess offender risk and needs and to prioritize supervision and treatment resources for the higher-risk offenders. To expend our often-scarce resources on low-risk offenders does not contribute to reducing recidivism or increasing public safety. As a former warden and deputy commissioner of corrections, and presently as a probation administrator, I recognize that low-risk does not mean no-risk. In our work there is some level of risk in everything we do. But resources are not unlimited, and we know that most crime is committed by a small percentage of all offenders.

Therefore, whether we like it or not, we are in a triage business, and we exercise discretion every day at both the case and the agency level. Within the constraints imposed on us by both our internal and external stakeholders, we need to base our decisions on evidence-based practice. Assessing offender risk and needs and allocating resources accordingly are thus perhaps the most critical functions of any correctional agency.

Starting the Process

Probation in Connecticut is a statewide, unified system operated by the judicial branch of government. There are approximately 50,000 offenders under adult probation supervision, and, at this writing, there are 280 line probation officers. (An additional 97 officers have been allocated by the legislature for this fiscal year.) In juvenile probation, there are approximately 5,000 juveniles under age 16 assigned to the 115 line juvenile probation officers.

The initial decision to embark on developing a new Risk and Needs Assessment (RNA) instrument was driven by the desire to implement a scientifically validated offender assessment tool and to develop a new probationer classification system. It soon became evident that offender RNA was not just a tool but also a process.

Connecticut began this project in April of 1999, and it took approximately 2 years before the selected assessment instruments were used in all of our adult and juvenile probation offices. Reflecting back on the experience, I believe there are five issues of critical importance:

- ◆ The use of an external consultant who knows both corrections work and the prediction of criminal behavior;
- ◆ A careful, reasoned decision about whether to use an off-the-shelf instrument or develop an in-house instrument;
- ◆ A strong focus on staff buy-in to the need for assessments as the starting point for offender change;
- ◆ The provision of training for both staff and field office supervisors; and
- ◆ The development of a comprehensive strategy for quality assurance to maintain the integrity of the system.

Use of an External Consultant

Connecticut would not have been able to implement effectively a new RNA instrument without the assistance of an external expert. I doubt whether many probation agencies have the resources and expertise required to develop their own instrument or to select and norm an existing assessment instrument.

It is essential that an outside consultant knows the research on the prediction of criminal behavior and has experience in constructing tests and evaluating the psychometric and predictive attributes of an assessment scale. Someone who also has practical experience in probation, parole, or community corrections is highly desirable.

To implement an RNA process that moves an agency toward improved public safety requires staff to embrace a philosophy that offender change is achievable.

Therefore, an external consultant needs to understand the day-to-day activities and challenges of line staff as well as the often-conflicting political pressures confronting probation and parole administrators. Finally, clear and ongoing communication must be maintained between the consultant and agency management staff concerning the goals, activities, and progress of the project.

Off-the-Shelf vs. In-House Assessment Instruments

The primary reasons Connecticut selected an existing instrument were related to time and expertise. To develop our own assessment tool would have taken a lot longer than using an existing instrument, and it would have required greater expertise and resources to conduct an assessment research and development project.

Identifying and procuring knowledgeable outside researchers, pilot testing, and validation and reliability studies that require a follow-up of offenders after they have completed probation or parole supervision are time-consuming activities.

Even within the Correctional Service of Canada, which benefits from in-house research expertise and capacity, it took approximately 3 years to develop and fully implement its Offender Intake Assessment System.

However, there may be a greater buy-in when agency staff participate in developing their own instrument, and there is often an ongoing cost to administering existing validated RNA instruments. If an agency does decide to use an existing instrument, it should develop a well thought-out selection and implementation process and conduct a cross-validation study of the selected assessment instrument.

Implementation and Staff Buy-In

Implementing an RNA process as the first step toward reducing offender recidivism, and a corresponding commitment to offender change, require a paradigm shift for many probation officers. This shift will necessitate individual and agency self-reflection and self-adjustment. It may also necessitate a change in organizational culture that, for some staff, in some agencies, has supported a “them versus us” approach to their work. Such change will not occur easily and will require persistence, patience, and leadership.

The most difficult challenge for Connecticut was not in selecting a new RNA instrument but in managing the operational transition from existing procedures to evidence-based practice. The simple truth is that staff

Connecticut’s Performance Requirements for an Assessment Instrument

- ◆ Be reliable and valid (possess internal reliability, inter-rater reliability, predictive validity, and dynamic validity).
- ◆ Generate information that is clinically relevant.
- ◆ Feel comfortable to staff using it.
- ◆ Provide data to administration that is useful for formulating resource allocations, performance assessments, and population trends.
- ◆ Prescribe levels of supervision and treatment: services and intensity.
- ◆ Be supportable by other system actors (judges, district attorneys, police departments, treatment providers, etc.).
- ◆ Provide a foundation for the pre-sentence interview and assessment.
- ◆ Give line officers a product they actually want, through a process that optimizes their experience and skills.
- ◆ Render minimal threats to line officers’ decision-making autonomy.
- ◆ Be available in an automated format capable of generating tailored reports.

want to know not just the “what” but also the “why,” and they are more likely to support decisions that they have participated in making.

Our agency adopted the following strategies to increase staff support for the RNA project:

- ◆ We established a project oversight committee with field supervisors and line staff representation.
- ◆ We used staff to pilot and select the preferred assessment instrument based on agreed-upon performance requirements.
- ◆ We selected field staff (including supervisors and line staff) to conduct training in the new assessment process.
- ◆ The executive management team conducted line staff information sessions as part of a strategy to increase staff acceptance and support of the new assessment tools.

Even so, for many staff, these efforts were not sufficient to obtain their buy-in. Major obstacles to obtaining stronger staff support have been:

- ◆ The increased time to complete the assessment instruments;
- ◆ Increased accountability for staff to respond proactively to the results of the assessments;
- ◆ The corresponding shift from a containment model of supervision to a behavior change model;
- ◆ The new skills required by line officers to support this model; and
- ◆ The lack of agency-specific evidence and experience of how this model correlates with increased public safety through a reduction in recidivism.

A greater emphasis on establishing training and reinforcement systems that foster the values and attitudes supportive of offender change was, and still is, required.

Staff Training

To train all probation staff, we selected as trainers the probation supervisors and line staff who participated in the initial assessment pilot and had practical experience in using the new assessment protocols. These selected individuals were intensively trained for 5 days on teaching the new assessment instruments, as well as in Motivational Interviewing.

No matter how reliable and valid an interview driven assessment instrument is, it is ultimately only as good as the individual who is administering it. Although most RNA instruments do not require specialized expertise to complete, staff should be trained in Motivational Interviewing. Motivational Interviewing is an evidence-based model that uses communication techniques and strategies that can reduce defensiveness of clients, obtain better-quality information, and assist the client in resolving ambivalence toward changing harmful behaviors.

Field office supervisors must also support an RNA instrument and process if it is going to be successful, because field supervisors remain the most significant force in shaping the behavior of the staff they manage. Without their support, no new initiative or change effort can be successfully implemented and sustained. Therefore, we trained all field supervisors in the new RNA instruments and Motivational Interviewing before line probation officers were trained. All probation staff participated in a 3-day training program before using the new assessment instruments.

Quality Assurance

Where evidence-based treatment interventions have failed to show reductions in offender recidivism, the reasons can often be linked to breakdowns in the assessment process and in adherence to the risk and need principles. There often is also a lack of quality assurance to ensure the fidelity of the treatment interventions. The most serious mistake any agency can make when introducing an RNA instrument is to ignore the importance of maintaining the assessment process.

In Connecticut, we took several steps to maintain the integrity of the system and promote quality assurance.

- ◆ **Appointing full-time quality assurance staff coaches.** After training in-house trainers, we appointed five field staff from the group to work full time in our Center for Best Practices as quality assurance coaches for our RNA instruments and Motivational Interviewing. When all probation staff completed their assessment training, they were required to conduct a minimum of nine assessments and send them to the assigned coaches. The coaches reviewed each assessment to determine if there were any scoring errors and gave the staff person individual feedback on the results. Individual staff error rates were calculated, and staff were required to continue to send assessments for review until their error rate was at an acceptable level.
- ◆ **Automating the assessment instruments.** Within the first year after the new assessment process was implemented, we obtained authorization to automate the assessment instruments for our use in Connecticut. The advantage of automated assessment instruments is that they can be programmed to improve internal consistency and to calculate the total score and sub-scores, as well as to provide summary profiles to assist staff in interpretation and application. In addition, assessment results can be analyzed at the office and individual officer level for uniformity. Aggregate statewide results can also

provide a gap analysis to determine the need for additional or different treatment resources.

- ◆ **Establishing a critique process for Motivational Interviewing and offender contact.** Research suggests that it is not the *quantity* of contacts between probation and parole officers and the offenders they supervise but, rather, the *quality* of the contact that is likely to facilitate offender change and reduce recidivism. Therefore, field supervisors need to focus on the purpose, activities, and quality of the interactions between their officers and the offenders. With this in mind, we are implementing a Contact Quality Critique process at both the time of assessment and during ongoing supervision. Field supervisors are required by policy to conduct monthly individual meetings with each officer they supervise to provide coaching and performance feedback. At a minimum of once every 6 months, supervisors must observe an assessment or supervision meeting between the officer and an offender and complete a written critique of the content of the interaction as well as the officer's Motivational Interviewing skills. Immediate feedback is provided, and further discussion takes place at the monthly staff supervision conference.

- ◆ **Providing assessment booster training.** In addition to feedback and reinforcement by supervisors, it is important to provide staff with periodic booster training in the assessment process. This year as part of the annual in-service training for probation officers, we are conducting an assessment booster. A Motivational Interviewing booster will be conducted during 2005. This training will be provided by the full-time quality assurance coaches and will give them an opportunity to determine individual probation officers' knowledge and skills and enable them to follow up with additional coaching when needed.

- ◆ **Conducting research and evaluation.** We have established a contract with an external consultant to complete a 3-year evaluation of the implementation of the selected assessment instruments and evidence-based practice. This project will determine the scale reliability and predictive validity of these instruments in relation to the Connecticut probation population.

Our Ongoing Commitment

Implementing an RNA instrument and process is not an easy or quick undertaking. In Connecticut's adult and juvenile probation system, it has been nearly 4 years since we began this project. In changing operational business practices, we have met with resistance at all levels of the agency. However, this project is an essential first step towards achieving a goal of enhanced public safety through reductions in offender recidivism. Even if these reductions are only modest, when they are translated into a decrease in crime and in victim suffering, there is no ethical option other than to move in this direction. ■

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Risk/Needs Assessment Implementation in a Nutshell—

Connecticut's Court Support Services Division followed a series of chronological steps in implementing the new RNA process. These steps were not always pre-planned or known to us when we started, and they may not necessarily be appropriate for other probation or parole agencies interested in implementing an RNA tool and process.

1. Selected an external consultant to facilitate and assist in the process.
2. Established a project oversight group comprised of both management and line staff.
3. Decided to use an existing assessment instrument rather than developing one "in-house."
4. Developed desired performance criteria for selecting a new assessment instrument. (See box, page 44).
5. Selected four adult and four juvenile assessment instruments to pilot test.
6. Trained a total of 60 probation officers for 5 days in administering the selected instruments and in Motivational Interviewing.
7. Directed the trained staff to administer each instrument over a 10-week period, resulting in assessments of approximately 1,000 offenders.
8. Collected and reviewed each completed assessment (as well as audiotapes of the assessment sessions) for errors and provided written feedback to each probation officer.
9. Conducted pertinent clinical, reliability, and offender profiling analysis on each instrument that was being tested.
10. Asked the pilot probation officers to complete surveys on their perceptions of how each of the instruments performed in relation to the performance criterion that had been established.
11. Conducted a 1-day meeting with all pilot probation officers, shared results of analysis and surveys, and had the officers identify the assessment instruments they preferred. Officers preferred the Level of Service Inventory–Revised (LSI-R) and the Adult Substance Use Survey (ASUS) in adult probation, and the Juvenile Assessment Generic (JAG) and the Substance Use Survey (SUS) in juvenile probation.
12. Reviewed pilot results with oversight group and the agency's Executive Director and selected the LSI-R/ASUS and JAG/SUS as the agency's standard adult and juvenile probation assessment protocols.
13. Conducted an adult probation workload study using the LSI-R/ASUS protocol and tracked the probationer supervision activities of a representative sample of probation officers.
14. Normed and calibrated the LSI-R and JAG to a Connecticut probationer sample population and established "cut points" to configure Connecticut's probationer classification system.
15. Completed the workload analysis and identified staff shortages based on the new classification system.
16. Identified staff to be trained as trainers in the new assessment instruments and in Motivational Interviewing.
17. Established written agency policy on probationer assessment/classification and standards of supervision.
18. Trained probation supervisors and line officers in selected assessment instruments and in Motivational Interviewing.
19. Established a quality assurance protocol for the new RNA process.
20. Pursued additional tasks that are still under way:
 - Conducting regular RNA booster training.
 - Completing treatment services gap analysis.
 - Designing and implementing an automated probationer Case Plan to support the alignment of the assessment results with treatment services and supervision practices (in pilot phase at this writing).

Empirical Evidence on the Importance of Training and Experience in Using the Level of Service Inventory–Revised

Recent trends in corrections have mandated the adoption and use of risk and need assessments for offenders. Research indicates that many correctional agencies around the country either currently use or are in the process of implementing risk and need assessment instruments. One example of an instrument that is being implemented on a wide scale is the Level of Service Inventory–Revised (LSI-R). Data from Multi-Health Systems, Inc. (MHS), the company that markets the LSI-R, indicate that more than 600 agencies in United States currently use this risk/need assessment tool. While increasing use of objective classification instruments is encouraging, simultaneously there are growing concerns regarding the effective implementation of these “third-generation” risk/need assessment tools.

The authors of the LSI-R, in discussing risk assessment in general, express concern about the ability of correctional practitioners to understand and properly administer risk assessment instruments. Research by Bonta, Bogue, Crowley, and Motiuk (2001) that investigated the implementation of the LSI-R indicated error rates that were of concern. Their research also indicated that these error rates could be reduced through the use of training prior to implementation. While currently there is a lack of quality assurance research conducted on other instruments such as the Wisconsin Risk and Need scales or the Salient Factor Score, it is conceivable that errors occur in these instruments as well. This may be particularly true when considering the potential for agencies, which may be in a rush to implement best practices, to skip necessary, preliminary research and training.

About the LSI

The LSI-R is a 54-item risk/need assessment tool that covers 10 criminogenic (crime-producing) domains. The areas covered include criminal history, education/employment, finances, family/marital relationships, accommodations, leisure/recreation, friends/acquaintances, alcohol/drug use, emotional/mental health, and attitudes/orientations. To score the LSI-R assessment properly, practitioners conduct a semi-structured, one-on-one interview with the offender, using an interview guide that assists in the gathering of necessary detail. The structured interview generally takes between 35 and 45 minutes.

The primary purpose of the interview is to gather information from the offender in a dynamic way, which means to assess these criminogenic domains as they currently exist within the offender’s life, offering a real-time picture of his or her criminogenic needs. Several pieces of supporting material, such as the inter-

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view guides, have been developed to assist the practitioner with the structured interview.

In addition to using information from the structured interview, the practitioner will also review collateral information such as police files, criminal background checks, court files, and probation files. The review of collateral information is important, as it allows the practitioner to verify information that comes out in the interview as well as to challenge potential inconsistencies. The use of collateral information may also help facilitate the interview itself, offering the practitioner insight into a new case prior to the interview.

The LSI-R is an example of a risk/need assessment tool that, when properly implemented, will allow an agency to observe the currently recognized “best practices” in offender assessment. Due to the depth and breadth of the tool itself, it is necessary for practitioners to have a fluent understanding of the general principles of offender classification—the risk, need, and responsivity principles. In addition, practitioners also need to understand the specific technical aspects of the tool—the interview process, use of the supporting materials, and the measurement/scoring of each of the 54 items. At a minimum, participation in a training session facilitated by individuals with a high level of expertise both in offender classification in general, and the LSI-R in particular, is necessary in order for practitioners to obtain the skills necessary to do the assessment properly. Ideally, practitioners will also receive follow-up training after the initial training, where reinforcement of the scoring rules and the process in general will occur.

Formal training is the ideal environment to address the need for skill development among practitioners wishing to use the LSI-R. Also important, however, is consideration regarding implementation on the agency level. When anything new is implemented into an existing agency or organization, adjustments must be made regarding workload and the order of certain processes. As such, any agency wishing to implement the LSI-R will likely need to work out several “bugs” to ensure proper implementation. It is important for agencies to allow time for both individual (practitioner-level) skills to develop and for agency processes to adjust in order to accommodate the implementation of the LSI-R.

Research on the Importance of Training

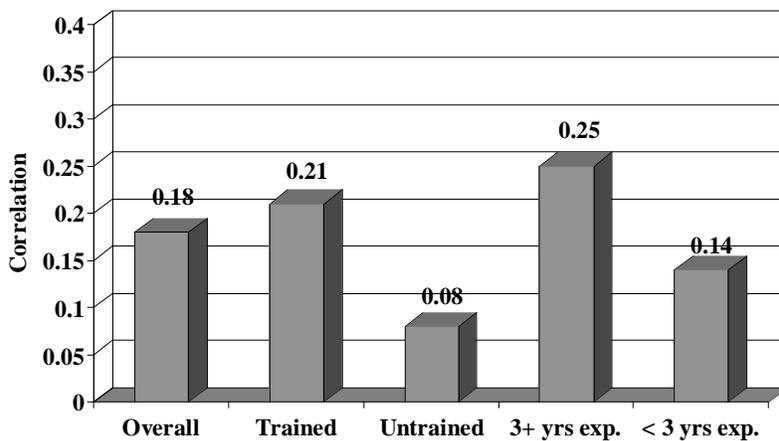
Two recent studies on the implementation of the LSI-R underscore the importance of training and quality assurance as they relate to the use of risk/need assessment instruments. The importance of these processes cannot be overstated in light of the movement demanding that agencies base decisions relating to supervision and treatment on comprehensive (and valid) risk/need assessment results. It is therefore extremely important that these assessments be accurately administered and scored, thereby producing meaningful and readily usable results.

Focusing on training and experience. The first study (Flores, Lowenkamp, Holsinger, and Latessa, 2004) investigates the link between training on the administration of the LSI-R and the predictive validity of the instrument. LSI-R scores

and recidivism data were collected on 2,030 offenders assessed at one of nine residential community correctional facilities in Ohio. Each agency providing LSI-R scores was categorized based on: 1) the length of time it had been using the LSI-R (less than 3 years, or 3 or more years), and 2) whether formal training had been provided to staff on the administration and scoring of the LSI-R.

Flores et al. calculated the correlations between LSI-R scores and recidivism (defined in this study as incarceration) for the entire sample of offenders and then for each agency separately.¹ The next step in the analyses was to calculate correlations for the groups of agencies based on their years of experience using the LSI-R and also based on their training status. The correlations for the entire sample and the groupings of agencies is presented in Figure 1. The correlation found for the entire sample is .18. However, when examining the correlations based on the groupings of agencies an interesting and expected pattern is revealed. The correlation for the agencies providing formal training is significantly higher than the correlation produced by the agencies without formal training (.21 for trained versus .08 for untrained). Further, the agencies that had 3 or more years' experience in using the LSI-R had correlations that were substantially larger (.25) than those produced by agencies with less than 3 years' experience in using the LSI-R (.14).

Figure 1. Quality Assurance and Offender Assessment: Predictive Strength of the LSI-R



Outcome defined as incarceration. R values for trained ranged from .16 to .26; for untrained, -.02 to .18. R values for 3 years+ ranged from .19 to .30, for less than 3 years .08 to .20. See Flores, Lowenkamp, Holsinger, and Latessa (2004), Predicting Outcome with the LSI-R: The Importance of Quality Assurance.

¹ Positive correlations indicate a positive relationship between the composite LSI-R score and the likelihood of recidivism. As the LSI-R score increased in value, the likelihood of being incarcerated increased as well. Positive correlation coefficients (Pearson's r), can range in value from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating no relationship, and 1 indicating a very strong (perfect) relationship.

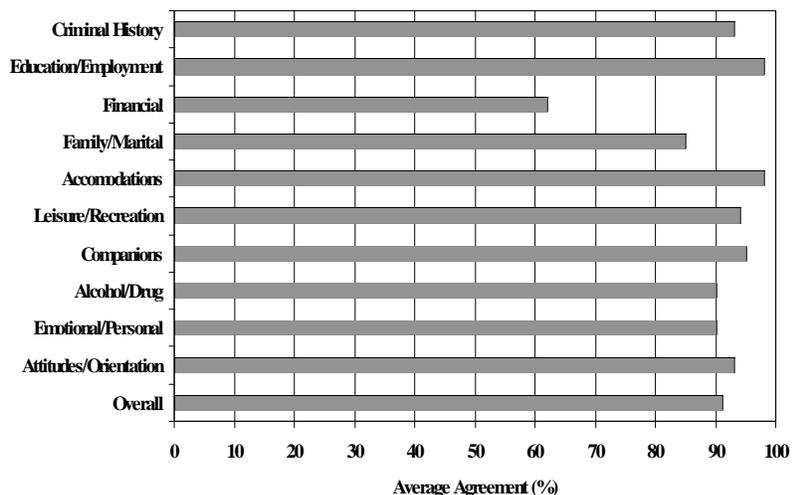
These findings are consistent with research conducted on best practices in correctional interventions. Specifically, Lipsey (1999) found that the effectiveness of programming is positively related to being in operation for 2 or more years. Also of interest, the Washington State Institute of Public Policy (2004) recently found that family-based interventions were effective in reducing recidivism when properly implemented, but when poorly implemented the programming was associated with increases in recidivism. The findings of Flores et al. that training and experience with the LSI-R are related to its accuracy, are consistent with similar measures for other types of core correctional practices.

Focusing on inter-rater reliability. The second study (Lowenkamp, Holsinger, Brusman-Lovins, and Latessa, 2004) investigated the inter-rater agreement of LSI-R trainees. In this study 167 correctional practitioners participating in a LSI-R training were asked, at the conclusion of the training, to complete a LSI-R assessment based on a written vignette. These assessments were compared to each other regarding the agreement among individual raters in the scoring of each item and the overall classification level that was determined to apply to the offender described in the vignette.

Figure 2 presents the data resulting from the analysis of inter-rater agreement. Across all 54 items there was, on average, a 91% agreement rate. While the agreement rate varied based on the need area assessed, 8 of the 10 subsections of the LSI-R had agreement rates of 90% or higher. One section had an agreement rate of 85% and one section a 62% agreement rate. Regarding classification, 86% of the assessments placed the offender in the moderate/high risk category.

These results revealed two important findings for the sample of just-trained practitioners under consideration: 1) the vast majority of the practitioners placed the offender characterized in the vignette into the same risk level, and 2) an even

Figure 2. Inter-Rater Agreement of Trained Staff Using the LSI-R



higher percentage of practitioners recognized the same set of criminogenic needs in the individual described by the vignette and agreed on the magnitude/importance of those criminogenic needs as they currently existed in the offender's life/environment. Although comparable data on inter-rater agreement rates of untrained practitioners are not currently available, these results lend support to the importance of formalized technical training regarding not only the LSI-R in particular, but any new assessment process in general.

Applying Quality Assurance in Risk/Need Assessment

These results support two important concepts regarding the implementation of the LSI-R: formalized training and agency experience. The LSI-R and other third-generation risk/need assessments have greater usefulness than previous assessment methods. The LSI-R measures more relevant criminogenic factors than its predecessors, and it measures these factors in a dynamic way. Dynamic measurement allows for a more accurate and valid risk/need scale and allows for the measurement of change in the offender over time. Due to the dynamic and comprehensive nature of the LSI-R, however, training and experience become extremely important. A lack of training (or "bootleg" training conducted informally by non-certified trainers) will result in reduced accuracy and effectiveness.

To fully utilize the potential benefits of the LSI-R, or any third-generation risk/need assessment process, agencies should obtain formal training for all practitioners who will conduct the assessments. Agencies should also expect a "learning curve" to take place, where issues specifically relating to LSI-R implementation are worked out.

In addition to being an effective risk/need classification tool, the LSI-R also lends itself to the development of comprehensive dynamic case planning. Case planning is most effective when it focuses on criminogenic factors and allows for the measurement of change in these factors over time. If the LSI-R is not administered properly, the classification decisions and all processes based on the tool (such as case planning and the monitoring of progress) will be severely hobbled. Clearly, in order to fully reap the benefits that an assessment tool such as the LSI-R can offer, both training and perseverance are key. ■

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