REVEALING RESEARCH & EVALUATION (RREV)

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Assessing an offender's risk is an important task as every day, our custody staff and probation officers make decisions that impact the safety of the public, institutional security and the offender's status. These decisions need reliable and accurate assessments of the offender's risk to commit another crime or threat to institutional security. In this issue we provide some background on risk assessment, describe the tools we use, and discuss ongoing research here in the Branch.

Risk Assessment in British Columbia

During the 1990's, there was a shift in correctional philosophy, referred to as the "What Works" Movement (Ward and Maruna, 2007).

The literature on offender management showed an increased emphasis on risk and needs, matching offenders to services for specific risk factors. Important advances in offender risk assessment came from the work of Dr. Don Andrews and Dr. James Bonta. In BC, there was a growing awareness of the need for more accurate information and an increase in the accountability of the Public Service. This led the Branch to strengthen their strategic case management.

By the mid-90's, three new risk assessment instruments were implemented by Community Corrections to assess offenders' risk of reoffending and guide decision-making: the Community Risk-Needs Assessment (CRNA, now known as the Corrections Risk-Needs Assessment), the Sex Offender Risk Assessment (SORA), and the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA).

The CRNA, our primary community risk tool, was developed specifically for BC Corrections by Dr. Bill Glackman of Simon Fraser University. The CRNA was based on Andrews and Bonta's Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) model.

Improvements are ongoing as risk assessment in BC has become increasingly sophisticated and comprehensive.

Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR)

The RNR model has 3 three core principles:

1) the ***risk principle:*** criminal behaviour can be reliably predicted and the level of service should be matched to the offender's risk to reoffend.
2) the ***need principle:*** correctional programs should focus on *criminogenic needs* -dynamic (changeable) risk factors that are directly linked to criminal behaviour.
3) the ***responsivity principle:*** maximizing an offender's ability to learn from an intervention by tailoring the intervention to the offender's learning style, motivation, abilities, and strengths. There is *general* responsivity and *specific* responsivity.

⇒**General responsivity:** the use of cognitive social learning methods to influence behaviour. These methods are the most effective regardless of the type of offender (e.g., female offender, Aboriginal offender, sex offender). This approach calls for correctional practices such as pro-social modeling, the appropriate use of reinforcement and problem solving (Dowden & Andrews, 2004) .

⇒**Specific responsivity:** a "fine tuning" of the cognitive behavioural intervention. It takes into account strengths, learning style, personality, motivation, and bio-social characteristics (e.g., gender, race) of the individual. (Bonta & Andrews, 2007).

Offender Risk Assessments in BC Corrections

The following section provides a brief description of the current risk assessment tools we use with our offenders. Most are tools that have been validated, which means they have undergone studies that have shown they measure what they intend to (risk of reoffending) with reasonable accuracy.

The CRNA is a "dynamic assessment" scale that is empirically based and includes both static and dynamic items . The tool was introduced by the community division in 1996 and validated by Dr. Glackman in 2002 for use with male and female offenders, including Aboriginal offenders. It guides the determination of the level of supervision required and the interventions necessary to target the offender's specific criminogenic needs. It consists of 10 dynamic factors assessing criminogenic needs and 10 static factors assessing criminal history. Incorporating structured professional judgement at every step of the assessment process, the case manager rates the offender's overall risk associated with criminogenic needs and criminal history, and determines the supervision level. An offender's risk status is updated at the time of any significant event, or lacking an event, at minimum every six months.

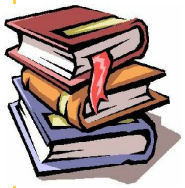
The Static-99 (Hanson & Thornton, 1999) is a validated actuarial assessment (an empirically based risk instrument consisting mostly of static risk factors). It was designed to assist in the prediction of sexual and violent recidivism for sexual offenders. Consisting of 10 items, it estimates future risk based upon the number of risk factors present in any one individual.

The SONAR (Sex Offender Needs Assessment Rating; Hanson & Harris, 2000) is a validated assessment tool for dynamic risk factors of sexual recidivism. The SONAR is comprised of two dynamic risk scales-the **STABLE 2000** and the **ACUTE 2000**. These scales, combined with the Static-99, form the basis for a blended approach toward community supervision designed to capture long-term, intermediate, and short-term factors associated with sexual recidivism (Harris & Hanson, 2003).

The SARA (Spousal Assault Risk Assessment Guide; Kropp, Hart, Webster, & Eaves,1995) is a validated set of structured clinical guidelines for assessing the risk and needs of men arrested for spousal assault. The purpose is to enhance professionals' judgments about risk to family, spouse or other. Ratings are based on information from multiple sources (e.g. victim, offender, addictions history, review of collateral records).

The IA (Inmate Assessment) is administered on all inmates admitted to provincial correctional centres. The outcome of the IA determines an inmate's security rating, placement, and escort level. The IA combines questions previously contained in the inmate classification assessment (ICA), classification report, and the escort assessment. It is updated as needed for all inmates when substantial circumstances change which effect the inmate's security rating, population designation, or escort rating. Additionally, inmates serving sentences of 30 days or greater are re-assessed at the time of any significant event, or lacking an event, at minimum every six months. To date, this assessment tool has not been validated.

A Brief History of Risk Assessment....



Actuarial risk assessment in its simplest form was first brought to corrections in 1928 by Burgess to assess who was and wasn't a good candidate for parole. In the 1970s, researchers began developing empirically based risk instruments to better predict future criminal behaviour and recidivism (instead of clinical judgement alone). Many assessments of offender risk in Canada now use an actuarial approach. Bonta and Wormith's review (2008) of the evolution of offender risk assessments revealed four generations of risk assessment. The CRNA is a 3rd generation tool. Visit the Evidence-Based What Works CorrPoint site for more information. https://collaboration.pssg.gov.bc.ca/Corr/EBP/default.aspx.

"Any correctional agency that has the goal to reduce recidivism should use, at a minimum, third generation risk-needs assessment instruments. The efficient and effective allocation of resources in the case management of offenders may benefit from the use of the recent fourth generation assessment instruments that integrate case planning with risk-needs assessment."

— Jim Bonta (March 2008)

A NEW FRONTIER in BC Corrections Risk Assessment

CRNA-K (Corrections Risk-Needs Assessment for Domestic Violence Offenders)

The 2005 Community Peer Review focused on the CRNA and SARA. The results of the review indicated general dissatisfaction with the SARA due to duplication with CRNA, an inability to complete the clinician's assessment fields, and a poor user's guide. The prevailing opinion was that the SARA was helpful for risk assessment but less useful for needs assessment and the development of case management plans. In response to these concerns, the CRNA-K was created specifically for domestic violence offenders. The CRNA is as predictive of risk of general reoffending as the SARA and better at predicting risk of domestic violence. Therefore the addition of the domestic violence component allows probation officers to complete one assessment process, increasing efficiency and reducing duplication. The resulting CRNA-K has been drafted and field tested. It is supported by research and has been the subject of a positive reliability study amongst probation officers.

Training will be simplified, reducing costs of instructors, staff time and travel. The built-in users guide is a significant improvement over the current handbook and provides examples for consideration that are practical and easily understood.

HIGHLIGHTS OF CRNA-K

- The CRNA-K contains all the relevant factors for domestic violence that are found in the SARA, the research literature and our own Branch research.
- The ratings are consistent and reliable across assessors.
- It assists POs with case management plans specific to domestic violence offenders.
- It is simple to use and has the familiar format of the CRNA.
- It takes the concerns of victims into consideration.

The Corrections Risk-Needs Assessment

Advancing Offender Programs
Building New Possibilities

The Corrections Branch strives to provide program opportunities for offenders that address criminogenic behaviours. Given the organizational commitment to adhere to evidence based practices, the Corrections Branch has undertaken a project to develop, introduce and evaluate offender programs. The Advancing Offender Programs (AOP) project will design programs that assist custody inmates in responding to cognitive behavioural programming and to focus the application of those programs to the higher risk offenders.

As discussed earlier in the RNR section, we need to identify criminogenic risks and needs in order to match the right offender with the right program. Therefore, the Branch plans to implement and validate the CRNA within the custody division. This ensures targeted program interventions, incorporates responsivity factors and evidence-based case management planning. The CRNA was renamed the "**Corrections Risk/Needs Assessment**" to acknowledge it as a branch-wide tool.

Risk Assessment Objectives (Hart, 2001)

Risk assessment evaluations

(a) estimate the risk of future antisocial behaviour and

(b) inform interventions to manage or reduce that risk.

If we determine how and why individuals chose to offend in the past, we can determine whether these or other factors might lead the individual to make similar choices in the future. The rating is representative of their overall risk, which is based on the known outcomes of a similar population.

Research from the field

The Risk Reduction Research study

The Corrections Branch is supporting the Risk Reduction Research study led by Dr. Kevin Douglas (SFU) and Dr. Tonia Nicholls (UBC and Forensics). They are examining the risk assessment and case management of mentally disordered offenders (MDOs) in order to develop an up to date risk assessment and management system for MDOs.

Persons with mental disorders often cycle between correctional and psychiatric facilities, largely because their criminological and mental health treatment needs are difficult to determine. This study seeks to reduce their probability of contact with both the correctional and mental health systems through the development of a comprehensive risk assessment and management procedure that addresses MDO needs and risks.

This study benefits public safety by potentially reducing recidivism, increasing MDO self-management, and reducing the fiscal burden associated with repeated processing of MDOs. The main research questions are:

- Do risk factors change across time?
- Are the changes in risk factors associated with changes in predicting recidivism?
- Do existing risk assessment measures adequately capture change in risk factors, or are there additional risk factors that need consideration?
- Do dynamic risk factors have better predictive accuracy than static or fixed risk items?
- Can we develop a risk assessment instrument that is well-suited to the unique needs of MDOs, and that adequately captures elements of dynamic risk?

The study is underway and participating centres are FRCC, FMCC, ACCW, NFPC and SPSC. The researchers are visiting each site to recruit subjects and conduct interviews. Follow-up with the participants will occur in the community offices.

If you have any questions, feel free to email or call the PREv Unit.

Offender Risk Assessments: Summary of Principles for Optimal Use

Research suggests that risk tools should be clearly structured to assess static (stable, enduring) risk factors and dynamic (more changeable) factors. In addition, accurate estimations of risk can be produced by tools that guide a structured professional judgement, such as our CRNA. Assessing acute (highly changeable) factors can also provide guidance about whether offending may be imminent.

When looking for risk predictions of specific offences, tools that are specific to certain types of offending, especially violent and sexual recidivism, provide a more accurate picture than generic risk tools. Interestingly, there is now some evidence suggesting that assessment of positive characteristics in an offender's life (skills, strengths and social resources) can affect the risk of re-offending, and should be included in an overall risk assessment.

Evidence-Based Practice - What Works! CorrPoint Site

The site provides a wealth of information about the PREv (Performance, Research, and Evaluation) Unit, current projects, posted evaluations, current research, and lots more! Visit the site for more information on risk assessments and the list of references used in this issue. Find the link to the site located on the left-side menu bar of the BC Corrections Branch home page.

The Performance, Research and Evaluation (PREv) Unit

Contact us!

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Evidence-Based Practice - What Works!

https://collaboration.pssg.gov.bc.ca/Corr/EBP/default.aspx