



What are Risk Assessments?

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Risk assessments cannot be used to determine if abuse, neglect or a violent or sexual act occurred. Generally, risk assessments are used to determine if someone is at risk for recidivism. At times, when allegations have been made, there are requests for risk assessment to determine if someone is likely to have acted in a violent manner. However, cautious conclusions need to be drawn when evaluations are conducted in the absence of actual charges. Types of risk assessments can include:

Amenability to Treatment

This type of evaluation is appropriate for *adult and juvenile offenders* to determine if their behavior is likely to reoccur and to what extent treatment can ameliorate future criminal behavior. These evaluations often look at the individual's cognitive functioning, social support, family life, work history, substance use, mental health diagnoses and personality functioning, acceptance of responsibility for behavior, insight into problems, impulsivity, and age of onset of criminal behavior. Different measures can include the Wechsler Intelligence Tests, MMPI-2 (or Adolescent version), Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory (MCMI-IV or Adolescent version), and Stages of Change for substance use.

Violence Risk Assessment

A psychologist will look at different variables to determine if someone is at risk of violence. *Static predictors* evaluate historical factors such as child abuse. *Dynamic predictors* evaluate things that do not change over time such as the tendency to be angry and hostile in interpersonal interactions. *Risk management predictors* evaluate the nature of the situation or environment in which the person currently lives or in the future such as access to drugs and alcohol and weapons. Assessment instruments such as the Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised and the Violence Risk Appraisal Guide are used in these evaluations.

Sex Offender Assessment

A psychologist evaluates the level of violence used in the past, age and gender of victims, use of drugs or alcohol, sexual fantasies, urges, and behavior, history of sexual abuse, age-appropriate sexual relationships, and age of onset of deviant interests. Different measurements of anger, denial, empathy, intimacy, and personality can be used. Instruments such as the Minnesota Sex Offender Screening Tool-Revised look at

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historical and institutional information such as treatment participation. The Multiphasic Sex Inventory includes scales for sexually deviant acts, cognitive process, behavioral aspects of offenses, and deceptive styles.

Domestic Violence Risk Assessment

The Spousal Assault Risk Assessment Guide is the only empirically validated assessment available. It identifies 20 risk factors, the presence or absence of critical items, and gives a summary risk rating of low, medium or high. However, checklists of behavior regarding actions that are emotionally and physically abusive, as well as life-threatening, can also be completed such as the Conflict Tactics Scale. Domestic violence dramatically increases with substance use so instruments such as the Michigan Alcohol Screening Test can also be used.

Child Abuse Risk Assessment

This is a very difficult area to assess and cannot help determine if someone has actually abused a child. Once child abuse is confirmed, the decisions to be made should focus on the risk of reoccurrence. There are different risk factors to consider: 1) individual and parent characteristics such as young age and lower socioeconomic status, 2) family factors such as marital discord, 3) community factors such as social support and employment stress, and 4) cultural values which support the likelihood of child maltreatment. The Child Abuse Potential Inventory has been found to have acceptable reliability and validity but should be completed along with parent interviews and observations.

Malingering

An assessment of malingering may be required when you believe that a suspect is not being completely honest. There are different types of malingering. The *pathogenic* malingerer may have a genuine disorder even if they are not being truthful about what is going on with the case. It may be that someone is pretending to have schizophrenia but they actually have post-traumatic stress disorder. They also may tell you or their attorney that they do not have any mental disorder when they actually do. The *criminological* malingerer is usually someone with antisocial personality disorder. They tend to lie in most situations when they are not getting desired outcomes. This dishonesty tends to be malicious in intent and they may even be lying to their own attorney. They are more likely to drag out the evaluation process. The *adaptational* malingerer is trying to get out of trouble but it not a general liar. This type of person usually repents easily when confronted. Psychological instruments can be administered such as the MMPI-2; however, as stated earlier, it is a self-report measure. More sophisticated measures of malingering are instruments such as the Structured Interview of Reports Symptoms (SIRS). The SIRS assesses a variety of areas such as defensiveness, uncommon symptoms, changes in behavior during the assessment, and common symptoms. One can determine if someone is trying to fake memory problems by using an instrument such as the Test of Memory Malingering.

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