

The Psychological Constructs Assessed by Static Risk Factors

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Risk assessments that identify the source of the recidivism risk are particularly useful to professionals engaged in the treatment and management of sexual offenders. The most commonly used risk tools for sexual offenders, such as Static-99R and Static-2002R, focus almost exclusively on static, historical factors (e.g., prior offences, age, victim characteristics). Although such factors are reliably related to increased or decreased likelihood of re-offending, it is not obvious how evaluators can use static, unchangeable risk to inform the selection of treatment targets or to evaluate change.

As argued by Mann, Hanson and Thornton (2010), however, static risk factors predict recidivism because they are markers for enduring risk-relevant propensities. Consequently, it should be possible to use demographic and offence history information to infer the major psychological constructs responsible for recidivism risk. Research has consistently identified two broad dimensions associated with sexual recidivism risk: a) general criminality, and b) sex crime specific criminality (or sexual deviancy). Items such as violations of conditional release, prior non-sexual violence, and the total length of the criminal history can be considered markers for general criminality or antisocial personality. In contrast, items such as non-contact sexual offences, male victims, young victims, and the total number of sex crime convictions are markers for sex crime specific criminality or deviant sexual interests.

In this symposium, we present three studies examining the psychological information provided by the Static-99R and Static-2002R risk assessment tools. In the first study, Robert Lehmann presents research showing that Static-99R, Static-2002R and RRASOR all provide incremental information for the prediction of recidivism. In order to create rules for combining these scales into an overall evaluation, however, evaluators need to understand the psychological constructs for which these static items are markers. In the second presentation, Sébastien Brouillette-Alarie uses factor analysis to examine the construct validity of Static-99R and Static-2002R. His analyses provide strong evidence that the latent constructs responsible for their association with recidivism are general criminality, sexual criminality, and age. In the final presentation, Kelly Babchishin describes how the age and general criminality dimensions from Static-2002R can be used as a stand-alone scale to predict general recidivism among sexual offenders.

This symposium should be of interest to evaluators who wonder how to combine diverse indicators into an overall evaluation of risk, and to all professionals who wonder why historical characteristics predict future behavior.

Incremental Validity of Risk Tools: How Construct Validity Can Help

Robert J. B. Lehmann, Ph.D. Candidate

This presentation examines the extent to which three static risk assessment tools (i.e., RRASOR, Static-99R, and Static-2002R) add incrementally to predicting recidivism, and tests three decision rules for combining these risk tools into an overall evaluation of risk. Based on a nine-year follow-up of 940 adult male sex offenders from Berlin, Germany, we generally found that each scale added incrementally to the prediction of recidivism. However, the incremental effect of RRASOR was negative for violent and general recidivism, meaning that higher RRASOR scores are associated with lower risk of violent and general recidivism. When risk tools assess similar constructs, the tools can be combined into an overall judgement of risk. The current study examined three combination rules: averaging, choosing the highest (riskiest), and choosing the lowest (least risky). When the measures assess the same latent constructs, averaging was the superior combination rule.

This presentation underscores the importance of understanding the constructs by risk tools, even if the sole purpose is prediction. Unlike traditional psychological measures, combining multiple risk scales requires a construct-level approach because these measures tend to assess multiple constructs (e.g., general criminality, sexual deviancy). The preferred method of combination will depend on whether or not the scales are measuring similar or different domains, as well as the domains' relationships with the outcome of interest.

Are there Psychological Constructs in the Static-99R and Static-200R?

Sébastien Brouillette-Alarie, Ph.D. Candidate

Factor analysis is one way to examine the construct validity of a scale and to determine the number of latent constructs assessed in a particular measure. There have been many factor analyses of the Static-99; however, previous studies have used only a subset of items, or used procedures inconsistent with what are widely accepted as best practices for factor analytic studies. The current presentation aims to respond to these shortcomings by applying theoretically grounded and methodologically sound factor analyses of the Static-99R and Static-2002. A large sample of sex offenders from multiple countries and settings was used (approximate $N = 7,000$ for Static-99R and $N = 2,000$ for Static-2002R).

The factor analyses supported a three-factor model, comprised of age, general criminality, and sexual criminality. The theoretical, psychological, and clinical value of these latent constructs was assessed by correlating the factors to other indicators of the constructs (e.g., PPG scores for the sexual criminality factor, cooperation with supervision item of the Stable-2007 for general criminality factor). This presentation provides empirical evidence that these risk tools are comprised of psychologically meaningful constructs. Importantly, different risk tools could be saturated with different degree of these constructs and, as such, construct validity analyses of commonly utilized risk tools should be

conducted. Such studies would allow evaluators to better explain discrepancies across risk tools and help inform the combination of these risk tools into an overall judgment of risk.

The Construct Validity of the General Criminality Subscale of the Static-2002R

Kelly M. Babchishin, Ph.D. Candidate

The main outcome of concern for sex offenders is sexual recidivism. However, sexual offenders are more likely to reoffend with a non-sexual offence than a sexual offence. Consequently, the risk for general recidivism among sexual offenders is an important concern. This presentation examines the construct validity of the general criminality factor of the Static-2002R. Based on approximately 2,000 adult male sex offenders, the Static-2002R general criminality factor (GC-02R) better predicted general recidivism than the Static-2002R total scores. The psychometric properties of the GC-02R (e.g., internal consistency) and norms for its use (i.e., absolute recidivism rates and relative risk indices) will be presented.

In addition, the convergent validity of the GC-02R was examined in a new, independent dataset of Canadian high risk sex offenders (approximate $N = 270$). The GC-02R was related to the other risk assessments tools for general recidivism (e.g., Level of Service/Case Management Inventory [LSI-CM], General Statistical Information on Recidivism Scale [SIR]), the psychopathy checklist (PCL-R), as well as other indicators of general criminality (e.g., criminal attitudes, criminal peers). We recommend that evaluators interested in predicting general recidivism among sex offenders use the GC-02R. In contrast, those interested in predicting violent (including sexual recidivism) can use either the Static-2002R total scores or GC-02R as they provide similar level of discrimination.