Module 2

Risk Assessment: A Tool for Sex Offender Management

Synopsis

The goal of this module is to provide information about the risk assessment process, and will demonstrate how risk differs from dangerousness, identify four strategies for evaluating risk for a new sexual offense, discusses static and dynamic risk factors, and identifies several well-known risk assessment instruments for predicting future sexual offenses.

Learning Objectives

After completing this module, participants should be able:

1. Be familiar with five risk assessment instruments used for adult male sex offenders.
2. Understand the differences between static and dynamic risk factors and how they impact community supervision.
3. More effectively use risk instruments in conjunction with officer judgments.
4. Provide baseline information to utilize risk instruments more effectively.

Participants Materials

Participant Manual

Facilitate the Module

LCD projector and laptop
Flip chart
Five sheets of paper or note cards with words from “Quite Game of Risk” listed

Handouts

Handout B1: Most Commonly Used Risk Instruments
Handout B2: Associations of the Final Items with Sexual Recidivism

Time Frame

Total 1 hour, 15 minutes

Module 2 At A Glance

Time	Description
5 minutes	Goal and Objectives
20 minutes	The Quiet Game of Risk
5 minutes	What is Risk?
	Information Gathering Process
5 minutes	Differentiating across Risk Levels
10 minutes	Risk Assessment Strategies
5 minutes	Risk Factors
25 minutes	Risk Instruments

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Risk assessment: A tool for sex offender management

Display slide #2-1

Trainer's Note: make some simple statement that module two discusses risk assessment before proceeding to the learning objectives.

Goal: To inform participants of the risk assessment process when supervising sex offenders in the community.

Module two: Risk assessment learning objectives

Trainer's Note: Introduces two of four learning objectives.

After completing this section trainees should:

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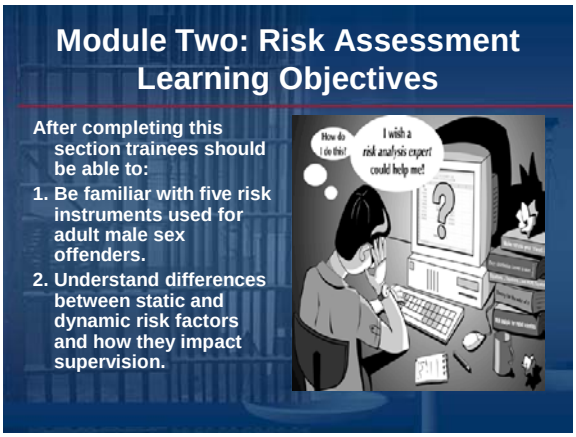

Trainer says about:
1. Be familiar with five risk instruments used for adult male sex offenders.
2. Understand the differences between static and dynamic risk factors and how they impact supervision.

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Trainer says about:
3. More effectively use risk instruments in conjunction with officer (clinical) judgments.
4. Provide baseline information for better utilizing risk instruments.

Tell Participants that you will be playing "The Quite Game of Risk."

Instructions for The Quiet Game of Risk

Divide participants in groups of three. Assign a referee for each group. Tell the participants that the "Quiet Game of Risk" is similar to the game show "Wheel of Fortune" and the old child game of "Hangman." The referee (aka Pat Sajak) will have a list of nine words. The referee should list the number of blanks for the first word on the list on a piece of paper (or a 5" by 7" note card). Here is an example:

_____ _____ _____ _____

Trainer's note—place four blanks on the flipchart for participants to see an example.

Participants will take turns guessing letters, but no one can talk. Participants must make their guesses by writing a letter down and showing it to the referee only and not the other participants. The referee will write the letter in the blank if it exists. For each letter the participant guesses incorrectly, the referee should draw a body part (the head, the torso, an arm, leg, hand, and foot) on the piece of paper. (Note: When each participant misses a letter, the body part is added to the same picture—the referee should not draw more than one picture for each word). Tell participants that every time they miss a letter, the risk of a child being sexually offended increases. Tell them that if they guess the word before the full picture is drawn, they have possibly saved a child from victimization. When they want to guess, they must write the word down and show it to the referee rather than say it out loud. If they guess the word incorrectly, a body part should be added to the picture. If they did not guess the word before the full body is drawn, someone was likely victimized. The referee should move to the next word whenever the word is correctly guessed or a full picture of a body (head, torso, two arms, two hands, two legs, and two feet) is completed. Whoever guesses the most number of words correctly will receive the "Risk Award."

Words to provide each referee on sheet of paper or note card:

1. Risk
2. Objectivity
3. Offender
4. Probation
5. Testing
6. Assessment
7. Bored
8. Instrument
9. Notification

After seven minutes or so, tell participants that they still are not able to speak, but rather than competing with the other member in their group, they should now work together and show each other their guesses. And, whichever groups guesses the most words correctly will receive the "Risk Award."

Give participants fifteen minutes to play the game. After fifteen minutes, say:

1. Determining risk is not a game—real lives are at risk.
2. Determining risk is a science, though a certain amount of "guesswork" may occur. The rules stated about "likelihood of victimization" because there are no absolutes with risk assessment. Simply "winning the game" or doing a "successful" risk assessment does not guarantee safety for a victim.
3. Communicating is more than speaking.
4. Documenting (as in writing) is very important—hence the reason for writing the letters and words
5. Sexual offenses often occur in secrecy, with the victim unwilling or unable to talk verbally about the experience (much like participants did not write).
6. When you competed with the participants, the likelihood of victimization increased—when you worked together—the game of risk was easier and the likelihood of victimization decreased. The same goes for supervising sex offenders under the containment model.
7. List the words on the flipchart in this order:

Probation
Risk
Offender
Bored
Assessment
Testing
Instrument
Objectivity
Notification

Point out that looking at the first letter of each word spells "Probation" and that probation and parole officers have a central role in supervising sex offenders.

What is risk?

Trainer's note: Slides #4, 5, and 6 introduce trainees to basic assessment information.

Display slide #2-4

Trainer Says About:
Before talking about risk assessments, it's necessary to clarify what's meant by "risk." One of Webster's definitions for risk states that "risk is the probability of loss or injury." For community corrections officers, this fear of loss or injury is measured differently across jurisdictions, and usually measures the likelihood of a noncompliant offender outcome. When supervising sex offenders, however, there is no

other fear of loss or injury more significant than the occurrence of a new sex crime.

Research has found that offenders with combinations of certain background characteristics (e.g., antisocial personality disorder) and other more malleable (changeable) characteristics (e.g., substance abuse issues) are more or less likely to commit another sex crime. Most of us refer to these offender characteristics as **risk factors**, and we are aware that validated forms or instruments exist to help officers assess the cumulative impact of such risk factors.

Before moving on, it is important to understand that risk assessment instruments do not measure harm or potential trauma. Risk assessment instruments are designed to capture statistical PROBABILITIES of the occurrence of a new sex crime, not reveal the amount of potential harm to a victim or the community. All sex crimes cause untold harm and trauma to their victims, families, and communities, but it must be understood that the amount of potential danger posed by an offender is NOT being measured by risk assessment instruments.

Risk Assessment: Information Gathering Process

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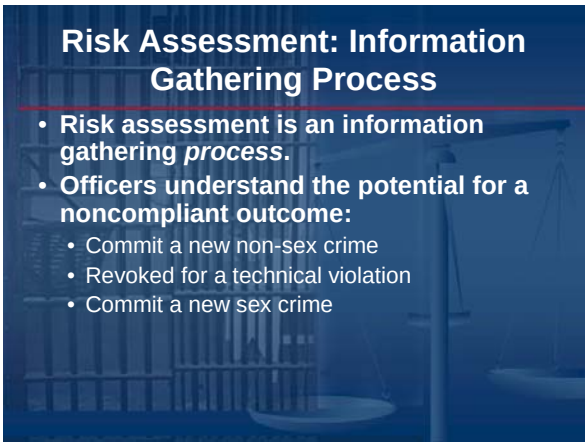

Trainer Says About:
Risk assessment is an ongoing PROCESS. It is not a one-time snapshot of the offender. Risk assessments are a powerful tool for gaining some perspective of the likelihood for an individual to commit another sex crime. Following the containment model, this training emphasizes how each of the *tools* of supervision can be incorporated to structure an offender's life with the hopes of preventing future sex crimes (and potentially bringing about long-term behavioral change). Risk assessment is one tool used to accomplish this overall strategy of applying external pressure to motivate or encourage sex offenders to not commit future sex crimes.

Differentiating Across Risk Levels

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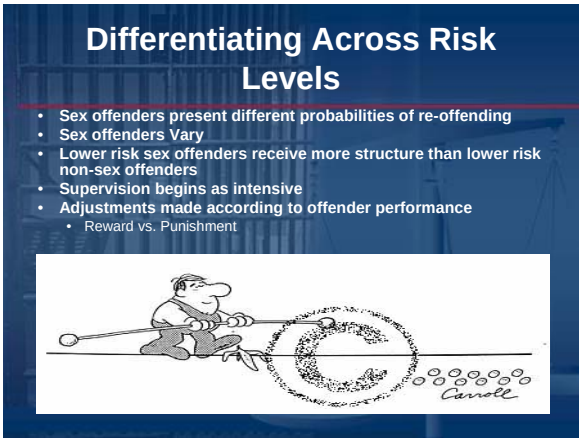


Trainer Says About:
Many of us have heard someone mention evidence-based practices (EBP) as an innovative approach to develop community corrections policies. This approach uses research to understand the everyday reality of offender patterns to shape future policies. So, what does all of this mean for risk assessment? Essentially, EBP argues that offenders—based

upon the combination of risk factors—have a greater or lesser chance of recidivating. This theory suggests that those offenders with greater risk of reoffending should receive the bulk of an officer's attention (and agency resources). On the other hand, lower-risk offenders receive less of an officer's attention.

Not all sex offenders have the same chances of committing a new sex crime while under supervision. I'm sure that some of you that have had sex offenders on your caseloads, you've recognized this difference. This does not mean that lower-risk sex offenders are simply placed on banked or administrative caseloads. Not at all; lower-risk sex offenders receive far more structure than other low-risk offenders. All sex offenders should begin their community sanction with extremely close supervision and officer contact.

Adjustments can always be made to supervision plans later. Officers should respond positively or negatively to all of an offender's behaviors. This, simply, means that if an offender is participating fully in treatment, not missing office or home visits, and is working toward a pro-social lifestyle, then, it is okay to recognize this positive behavior, such as with a verbal recognition. Just simply telling the offender that he/she is doing a good job could improve the offender's supervision. Offenders, while having committed a serious crime, need to see that they have a possibility to change their own behaviors.

Even small missteps, however, such as coming to office visits or treatment late, must be immediately responded to. It is essential to establish a strict hierarchy of control over the offender from the earliest of encounters. Sex offenders are known to be especially manipulative, and officers need to set a clear precedent of behavioral expectations for offenders. This approach prevents officers from waiting for something big to happen before reprimanding an offender. Instead, tight supervision and accountability are placed on all sex offenders initially, with adjustments depending on the offender's behavior.

Differentiating Across Risk Levels

Display slide #2-7

Trainer Says About:
Case management decisions are often made at the agency level, and you're encouraged to check with agency policies regarding supervision protocols. In some states, a three-tier system is used to differentiate among sex offenders, usually based upon the age of the victim and level of violence. When developing or adjusting case plans, think about what particular aspects of an offender's life can be changed to reduce the likelihood of them committing another sex crime (these are dynamic factors); and, at the same time, remain equally aware of an offender's past experiences (these are static factors) that cannot be changed but might also be related to future crimes. This is simply to say that case plans must be within

agency guidelines and protocols, but also to individualize, as much as possible, case plans around offender risks and needs.

Four Risk Assessment Strategies

Display slide #2-8

Trainer Says About:
There are four general risk assessment strategies that we are going to briefly discuss: (1) intuitive, (2) clinical, (3) actuarial, and (4) adjusted actuarial approach.

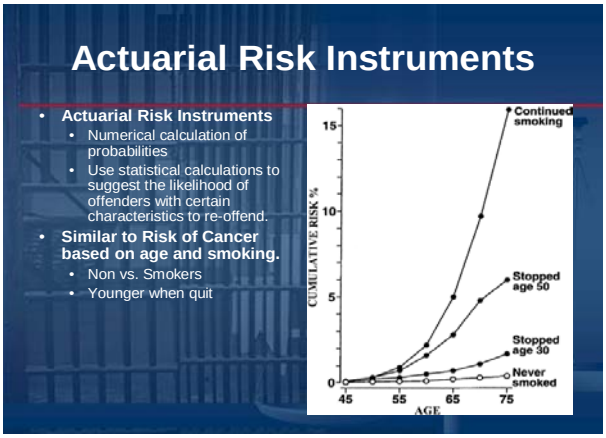
(1) The first of these approaches, the intuitive approach is just that, purely intuitive. This assessment of risk is based solely on subjectivity or "gut feelings" to determine supervision structure. Obviously, this approach has serious potential for biases to creep into case plans, it is inconsistent, and should be avoided.

(2) The clinical approach is slightly different, as it is based on officer training, wisdom, and experience, but still essentially a best guess on the part of the practitioner. This approach lacks consistency, is inefficient, and variable between officers.

Risk Assessment Strategies: The Actuarial Approach

Display slide #2-9

Trainer Says About:
(3) In the purely actuarial approach, officers rely completely on a formal, actuarial assessment tool to make case management plans. This approach is objective, uniform, and consistently predicts the likelihood of a new sex offense. Specific risk factors receive different statistical weights (or importance) as combinations of characteristics cluster to alter risk predictions (Barbaree et al., 2006; Harris and Rice, 2003).



Actuarial Risk Instruments

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Trainer Says About:
The actuarial approach relies on probabilities based on larger group data finding that offenders with specific characteristics (risk factors) are more or less likely to commit another sex crime. These statistical calculations can be thought of as (somewhat) similar to statistical predictions of cancer based upon age and history of smoking. As you can see in this chart, along the vertical axis is the cumulative risk of cancer based, and along the horizontal axis are ages of smoking cessation. In this case, a 45 year-old individual that never smoked has little difference in their likelihood to get cancer by the time they turn 75 years-old. Notice how this is markedly different from a 45 year-old that never stops smoking, they have a greater likelihood of contracting cancer, and few that continue smoking, live past 70 years-old.

This graph is a simple example of how risk assessments (whether predicting cancer or sex crimes) utilizes individual characteristics (some of which can be changed and others that cannot) to predict their chances of committing a new sex crime in the future. Interestingly, though, similar to how smoking is related to cancer, sexually deviant thought patterns are related to new sex crimes.

Risk Instruments Aren't Perfect

Display slide #2-11

Trainer Says About:
Actuarial risk assessment instruments aren't perfect. These measures cannot perfectly predict which offenders will commit a new sex crime, but they do provide officers with some understanding of the likelihood of such an event. Let's not forget that medical assessments aren't perfect either; we cannot **perfectly** predict those of us that will contract cancer sometime in the future. However, we do know that age and smoking habits are important correlates of cancer, just as we know that prior sex crimes, antisocial personality disorder, substance abuse, and access to potential victims are important correlates of a future sex crime, and when many of these factors cluster, the chances of a new sex crime become even greater. Similarly, few young smokers contract cancer, but as age increases and one continues to smoke (i.e., the clustering of factors), the likelihood of cancer becomes inevitable.

Why Use Risk Instruments?

Display slide #2-12

Trainer Says About:
So, why use actuarial risk instruments? We know they do not provide a perfect understanding of every offender. Risk assessment instruments do give officers some range of certainty and courtroom support for officer's decisions. Risk instruments are more accurate at predicting risk than either intuition or clinical assessment. These instruments also provide some direction for resource allocation. Risk assessment instruments are efficient and effective quantitative tool for community corrections officers supervising sex offenders.

Adjusted Actuarial Risk Assessment Approach

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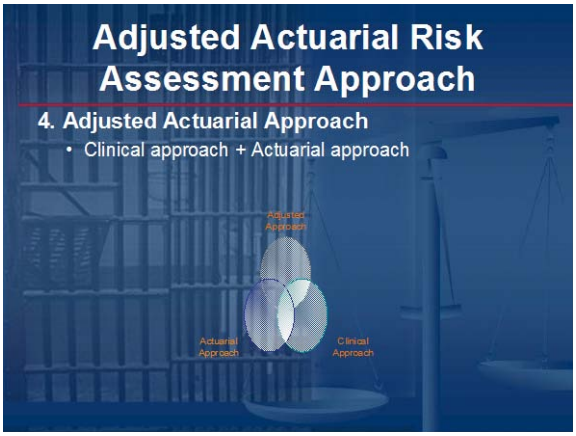

Trainer Says About
(4) The adjusted actuarial approach blends the clinical and actuarial approach. First, officers use a risk assessment instrument to determine a risk score. Then, if there is strong evidence that the risk instrument was incorrect, you should adjust the risk level of the offender.
The adjusted actuarial approach recognizes the need to incorporate officer expertise with a formal risk assessment instrument to most accurately assess the likelihood of a new sex crime.

Adjusted Actuarial Approach with Sex Offenders

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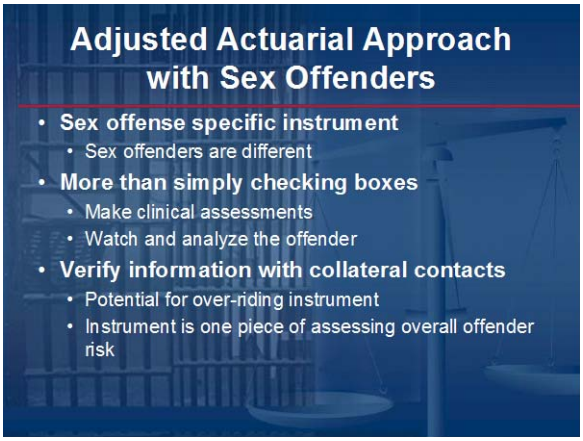

Trainer Says About:
Risk assessments come in many variants. There are general risk assessments such as the LSI-R and there are specialized assessments for specific offenses. It is important that officers utilize sex offender specific assessment instruments.

This curriculum stresses the TOOLS of supervision. In this case, one important tool is the actual risk

assessment instrument that offenders are to complete. What is often left out of risk assessment discussions is the need for officers to take an Adjusted Actuarial Approach by making subjective assessments as well. When conducting a risk assessment be attentive to body language, watch and analyze the offender during the assessment. It might be the case that a high-risk offender may evaluate as low-risk on an assessment, but you have reason to believe that he/she is hiding something. Both sources of information should be used. It might be that officers should override an assessment finding of low-risk when an offender seems high-risk. The most significant fear here is for an offender to be assessed too low, it is better to error with too much surveillance and work toward adjusting that down as offender behavior determines.

No matter how good of a risk instrument that you use or how well trained an officer is, it is still impossible to perfectly assess the chance that a particular offender will commit another sex crime. Risk assessments are one piece of understanding an offender's risk of reoffending. All information should be verified with supportive information from collateral contacts and other information gathered while supervising an offender.

Risk Factors: Static and Dynamic

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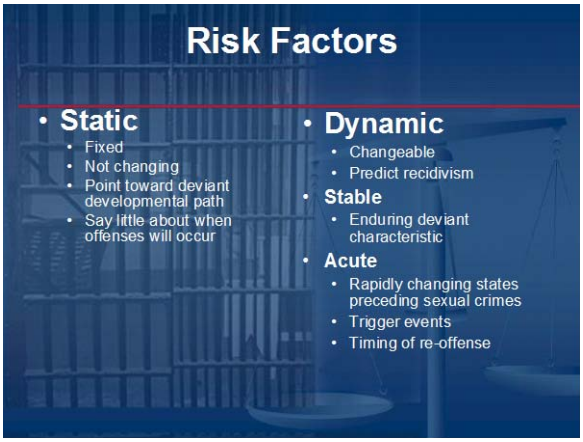

Trainer Says About:
There are essentially two primary types of risk factors used to assess the likelihood of another sex crime. These are static and dynamic risk factors. Static factors are fixed, non-changeable aspects of an offender's life. These are background characteristics such as prior sex crime conviction, prior nonsexual crime conviction, early age of onset, and others. This is important information, but these aspects cannot be changed; for the most part, they have taken place in the past.

Dynamic risk factors, on the other hand, can be changed and are what community corrections officers should pay most attention to while supervising sex offenders. These are the elements of an offender's life that can be altered to decrease the chances of a new sex crime. There are two types of dynamic risk factors: stable and acute.

Stable dynamic risk factors are relatively ingrained behavioral and personality characteristics that are rather constant over time but are potentially amenable to intervention.

Acute dynamic risk factors, which can change rapidly, are potentially more responsive to supervision and treatment interventions than are stable dynamic factors.

Risk Instruments

Display slide #2-16

Trainer's Note: Instruct participants to look at Handout B1 for a brief descriptive table of the five most common actuarial risk instruments for predicting sexual recidivism.

Trainer Says About:
There are many different risk assessment instruments available to accurately predict future sex crimes. This is not to say PERFECTLY predicting, rather that their relative predictive validity (or accuracy) is well-known and these instruments have been tested many times. These instruments provide estimates of risk (of a new sexual offense) based on the associations between a combination of items and a new sexual offense. These estimates can be thought of as providing the probability of people with the score expected to reoffend within a certain follow-up period.

We will not discuss every risk instrument for sex offenders, nor will we cover any one instrument in complete detail. Instead, we hope to introduce you to the more widely used instruments by briefly discussing the types of sex offenders each instrument was developed for and tested with, and also tell you about the types of questions or information that is used in each instrument.

VRAG

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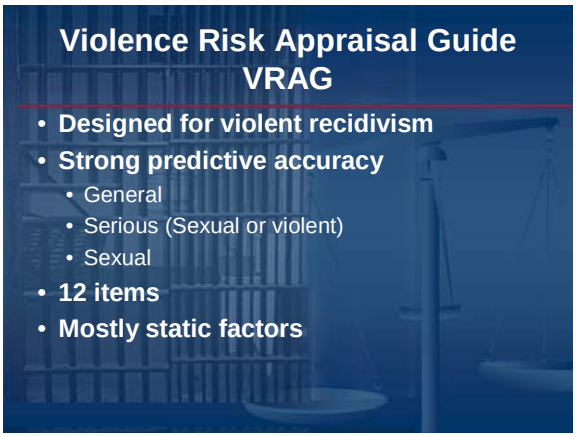

Trainer Says About:
The VRAG was originally designed to predict violent recidivism among correctional populations. It has been found effective at predicting general, violent, and sexual recidivism. This instrument contains 12 items mostly measuring static offender characteristics such as criminal history, childhood experiences, and psychological wellbeing. Besides these 12-items, this instrument includes the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R), which is a well-known instrument fro assessing psychopathic disorders in male correctional populations (see Hare, 1991).

SORAG

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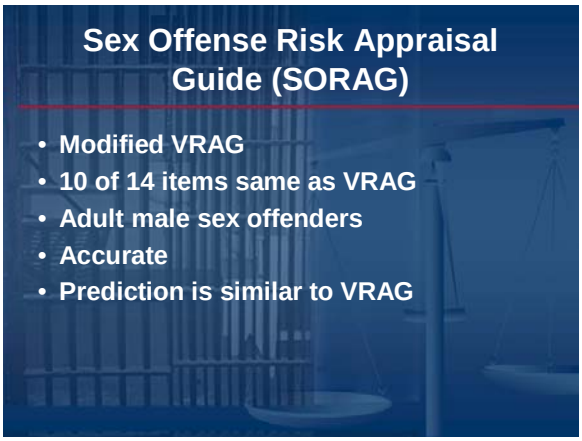

Trainer Says About:
The sex offense risk appraisal guide is an altered VRAG that was developed to sexual and violent offenses specifically among male sex offenders. The VRAG and SORAG are very similar instruments, and previous research found these instruments to predict similar outcomes (i.e., they would produce similar scores for similar offenders). Some of the added features to this instrument make it more specific for sex offenders by including items such as phallometrically measured deviant sexual interests and sex offense history.

RRASOR

Display slide #2-19

Trainer's Note: Below are the four factors and their scores. Notice that answers receiving scores of "0" reduce the likelihood of a new sexual offense. For example, about 8% of offenders scoring "1", 14% of those scoring "2", 25% of those scoring "3", 33% of those scoring "4", and 50% of those scoring "5" are arrested for a new sexual offense within a five year follow-up. In these studies, Hanson et al. found that about 80% of offenders scored 2 or less, with a small contingent of offenders posing serious risk of committing a new sexual offense within 5 years. Found four: prior sex offenses (0 to 3 points), age at release (more = 0 or less than 25 = 1), victim gender (male = 1, female = 0), relationship with victim (related = 0, non-related = 1)

Trainer Says About:
The VRAG and the SORAG involve complicated evaluations such as having someone trained in administering the PCL-R (psychopathy checklist-revised). And, for the SORAG, you must have access to a phallometric assessment, something that not every agency has access to. At any rate, Karl Hanson is one of the leading sex offender risk assessment experts for correctional purposes. He recognized the need for a more practical instrument to assess sexual offenses; using information easily obtained from administrative records.

Hanson focused on predictors or risk factors that were strongly associated with new sexual offenses. Predictor variables are offender characteristics that tend to co-occur with the outcome (in this case new sexual offense). They were able to refine this to only four factors because items

related to sexual offending that were closely associated with each other were excluded (inter-correlations). For instance, they found that being under 25 years old and being single both related to new sexual offense, but these two items were closely related to each (such that young people tended to be single). This allowed Hanson and associates to keep the strongest predictor variables that uniquely predicted a new sexual offense.

This is not to say that the RRASOR is intended as the only assessment administered, but is does seem to be an accurate assessment tool for understanding relative risk for a new offense.

Static-99

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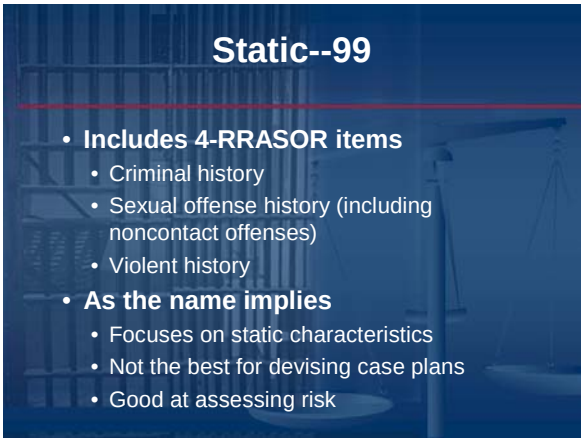

Trainer Says About:
The Static-99 is actually the combination of two risk instruments: the RRASOR and the Structured Anchored Clinical Judgment (SACJ). This instrument is easy to use in the field given that all the information can be culled from administrative files.

This instrument, as the name implies, uses only static risk factors to make predictive judgments. The Static-99 focuses attention on specific features of sex offenders including sexual deviance, victim range, persistence (e.g., age at onset), antisocial, and younger (than 25 years). If an offender has a history of victimizing males, there is a heightened chance of sexual recidivism is a factor known to correlate with sexual deviancy and past experiences victimizing strangers suggests a wide range of suitable victims.

MnSOST-R

Display slide #2-21

Trainer's Note: The following web address links to Dr. Douglas Epperson's home page (http://www.psychology.iastate.edu/~dle/); he has complete instruments with scoring, coding, and cutoff information.

Trainer Says About:
The Minnesota Sex Offender Screening Tool – Revised was developed in collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Corrections. Over a decade of research went into the development and validation of this instrument, which is used in many states to help inform decisions regarding resource allocation, community notification, and civil commitment.

The MnSOST-R is one of the most widely used risk assessment instrument to evaluate sex offenders. Douglas Epperson and the Minnesota Department of Corrections began developing this instrument in the early 1990's when a research edition was created with 21-items. Careful research and analysis refined the instrument allowing for deleting five items to more efficiently predict the relative risk of a new sex offense.

The instrument is suited for rapists and extrafamilial sex offenders. That is, the researchers did not include (due to legal definitional reasons) offenders with an exclusive history of non-penetrating intrafamilial offenses.

The MnSOST-R is used in at least 13 states to make civil commitment decisions, and numerous others use it to determine the level of notification and registration required.

Association of Final Items with Sexual Recidivism

Display slide #2-22

Trainer's Note: Refer participants to: Handout B2: Associations of the Final Items with Sexual Recidivism.

Trainer Says About:
There are four types of items on the MnSOST-R: dynamic, criminality, offense-related, and unstable lifestyle variables. Each of these sections is designed to uncover a specific element of an offender. The dynamic variables address institutional behaviors such as disciplinary history, chemical dependency treatment in prison/jail, and others. Criminality variables get at more traditional static factors including antisocial behavior as a child and victim range. Offense-related variables focus on the specific characteristics of the offender's crimes, such as use of force, age of victim, and stranger victims. The fourth section includes two lifestyle variables: substance abuse and poor employment history.

MnSOST-R: Risk and Scores

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Trainer Says About:
The MnSOST-R records four risk levels based on total points. Offenders receiving 3 or fewer points are considered at low risk to reoffend, which is not to say that some of these offenders will not recidivate, because some will. Offenders receiving more than 12 points are placed into a referral category, which is designed for localities having civil commitment.

MnSOST-R: Proportions and Recidivism

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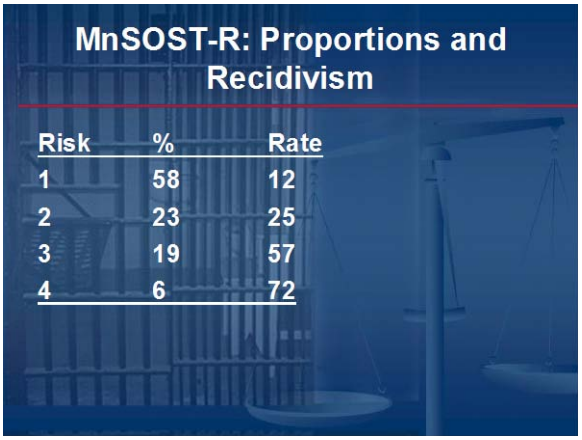

Trainer Says About:
To get a better idea of how the MnSOST-R assesses risk of recidivism, Epperson et al. have calculated the proportion of offenders fitting into each risk category and their related recidivism rates. There are about 12% of low-risk offenders that commit another sexual offense within six years, about one-quarter of moderate risk offenders, 57% of high-risk, and 72% of the referral group recidivate within six years of release. Not only are the recidivism rates interesting and useful, but so are the proportions of offenders fitting into each category. Recognize that nearly 60% of offenders were considered low-risk and few of them do reoffend, but there is also a contingent of about 20 to 25% of offenders fitting into the highest of categories. These offenders pose serious risk of reoffending

Dynamic Risk Instrument: SONAR

Display slide #2-25

Trainer's Note: Trainer should remind participants that stable dynamic factors are things that can change but tend to be enduring and may last for months or years (such as personality disorders, alcoholism). Acute dynamic factors are more rapidly changing, and tend to be items that affect one's mood (e.g., intoxication, acute anger). For more information go to: Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada (PSEPC): http://www.psepc-sppcc.gc.ca.

Trainer says about:
The risk instruments mentioned so far have been concerned with predicting long-term recidivism of sex offenders. Most of these instruments rely heavily on static or historical characteristics of an offender to make these predictions. This information is, no doubt, extremely important, but others have seen the need to incorporate offender characteristics that change. These are the features of an offender's life that can be changed to alter his/her chances of committing a new crime. Karl Hanson and Andrew Harris (1999) developed the Sex Offender Need Assessment Rating (SONAR) that includes both stable and acute dynamic factors to understand better when a new sexual crime is likely to occur, and is designed to compliment the Static-99.

The SONAR is composed of five stable factors (Stable 2000) which includes (1) intimacy deficits, (2) negative social influences, (3) attitudes tolerant of sexual offending, (4) sexual self-regulation, and (5) general self-regulation. The second portion of the SONAR includes four acute dynamic factors (Acute 2000): (1) substance abuse, (2) negative mood, (3) anger, and (4) victim access.

SONAR: Stable 2000

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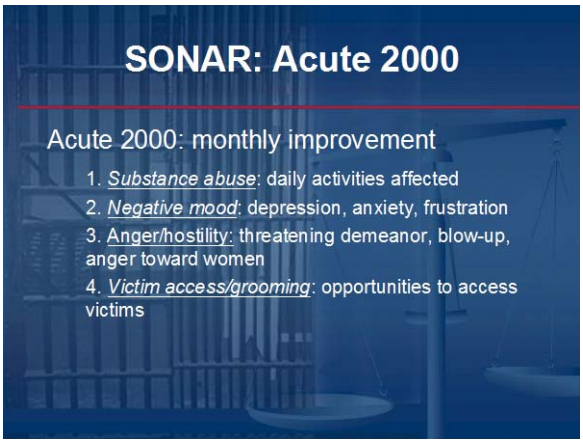
Trainer says about:
Stable 2000: is conducted every 6 months

1. *Intimacy deficits*: understand an offender's relationship and cohabitating patterns (i.e., 0 = non problematic cohabitating relationship, 1 = troubled relationship but cohabitating or non cohabitating relationship, and 2 = no current intimate partner).
2. *Social influences*: Offenders are asked about the people in their social network. Offenders are asked to detail all the people not paid to associate with them. Then, these people are evaluated as either: positive, negative, or neutral influence. The number of negative influences are subtracted the positive relationships to calculate a social influence balance score. Two or more positive relations = 0 points, 1 relation = 1 point, and 0 relations = 2.
3. *Attitudes*: offenders are asked about their attitudes toward rape and child molestation.
4. *Sexual self-regulation*: this item addresses the offender's ability to control his/her sexual urges or desires. Sexual self-regulation is measured with sexual entitlement and sexual preoccupations.

5. *General self-regulation*: this item uncovers an offenders level of general criminality and low self-control, and seeks to understand how well the offender will self-monitor to conform to community supervision.

SONAR: Acute 2000



Display slide #2-27

Trainer Says About:
Acute 2000: This instrument is used once a month to determine if and how much an offender has changed. Fore ach of the areas included, officers are to determine if an offender's behavior has improved (-1), gotten worse (+1), or stayed the same (0).

1. *Substance abuse*: have normal daily activities been affected over the past month due to drugs or alcohol?
2. *Negative mood:* determine how the offender's mood has changed regarding depression, anxiety, frustration, loneliness, and suicidal thoughts.
3. *Anger/hostility*: threatening demeanor, blow-up, and anger toward women
4. *Victim access/grooming*: talk with offender about his/her opportunities to have access to potential victims. Does the offender have an especially nice car or other item known to draw the attention of his/her preferred victim? Does the offender have hobbies that put him/her in interactions with potential victims?

Summary and Transition to the Next Module:

Trainer says:

In this module we have discussed ways to assess risk among sex offenders. While many of the risk instruments have been discussed separately, in some cases practitioners may decide to combine the different measures. Doing so has been found to "increase the accuracy in predicting sexual reconviction" (Craig et al., 2006, p. 612).

Officers must keep in mind that the scales are useful to predict long-term risk potential, but "they are poor measures of change" (Hanson and Harris, 2001, p. 105). This means that practitioners must not misuse these assessment tools. Misuse occurs if practitioners assume that particular offenders do not warrant as much supervision because a particular risk instrument score decreases at a certain point in time.

Because many states are passing laws requiring increased use of risk assessment instruments, it is expected that probation and parole officers will become even more involved in predicting risk in the years to come (Doren, 1998).

Regardless of which instrument or combination of instruments is used, probation and parole

officers must recognize that the risk of re-offending must be minimized by the officers' actions. One way to reduce risk is through close monitoring of offenders' behaviors in a way that holds offenders accountable. The notion of accountability is addressed in the next module.

Before moving on to the next module, let's take a ten minute break.