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2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

F-18

New Research Methodologies in Risk Assessment: Lessons from Developmental Life Course Criminology

Symposium Chair: Evan McCuish, PhD
Simon Fraser University

This symposium presents a developmental life course perspective on new research approaches and research methodologies in risk assessment and risk prediction with adults having been convicted for a sex crime. It follows a symposium presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers in 2015 (Montreal) by this team of researchers. This symposium will draw from theory and research within developmental life course criminology to re-examine current research and practice with respect to risk assessment and risk prediction. Developmental life course criminology concerns the study of crime and delinquency across the life span and associated risk and protective factors. Developmental life course criminology recognizes the role and importance of *age-graded factors and issues* relevant to the development of offending as well as the changing nature and role of risk/protective factors across the life span.

The symposium will draw from lessons learned from developmental life course criminology to examine issues with the use of risk assessment and the prediction of recidivism among individuals having been convicted of a sex crime. The symposium is composed of three inter-related empirical studies that draw upon data collected on a random sample of formerly convicted adult male offenders that were selected based on the criteria that these individuals (a) were convicted in British Columbia (BC), Canada and were under some form of community supervision between 2003 and 2012 and (b) were assessed using the Community Risk/Needs Assessment (CRNA) on at least one occasion in the past. The sample can be considered representative of adult sexual offenders under supervision (parole/probation) by BC Corrections during this time-span. Each presentation will draw from the field of developmental life course criminology to introduce new research methodologies to approach the assessment of risk of offending and reoffending across the life course.

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When Traditional Risk Assessment Tools Fail: Revisiting Risk Assessment and Risk Prediction Using a Criminal Career Approach

Patrick Lussier, PhD
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There is extensive research on the correlates and predictors of sexual recidivism among convicted sex offenders that form the basis of current risk assessment protocols for sex offenders. For the most part, these studies adopt a variable-oriented perspective by attempting to predict sexual recidivism irrespective of the age and stage of a person's criminal career. Therefore, the current scientific literature is not informative about the factors that may differentiate and predict a first sexual reoffense from a second, third or fourth re-offense, nor is it informative of how risk factors interact with each other at each stage of the criminal career. For example, it remains unclear whether risk factors that are relevant for an offender at age 20 are the same for those in their forties. In fact, current methodological models employed thus far do not allow for the identification of risk factors that are specific to the unfolding of the different criminal career stages. Therefore, using a decision-tree analysis and classification algorithm with a sample of 756 individuals convicted of a sex crime in Canada, the current study aims to bridge this gap by examining the benefits of a profile-based approach to exploring profiles of risk, starting with the initial conviction for a sex offense. The findings show that traditional risk assessment tools fail to predict sexual recidivism using a criminal career approach. They also show that there are distinctive risk profiles among offenders: some are unlikely to sexually reoffend more than once whereas others are more likely to present multiple sexual reoffenses. This study's findings suggest that the current variable-oriented risk assessment perspective may create significant biases that could be partly resolved by using a risk profile approach.

Learning Goals:

- Demonstrate some of the underlying issues and challenges related to current risk assessment protocols used with individuals having been convicted of a sex crime
- Explore new research methodologies for risk assessment and risk prediction purposes
- Highlight some of the key features and characteristics that the next generation of risk assessment methods should possess

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P(Δ) as a New Strategy for Measuring Change in Sex Offender Risk for Reoffending

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Contemporary criminal justice policies and assessment tools have portrayed sex offenders in terms of risk and risk probabilities, suggesting much stability in sex offending over the life course. Although developmental criminology has offered a serious challenge to this perspective, less is known about *why* there is more instability than stability in both the sexual and non-sexual offending patterns of sex offenders. That is, although researchers have challenged the emphasis on reoffending risk, they have paid less attention to stability or change in the tools used to assess risk. This is perhaps because common analytic strategies for measuring stability in level of risk do so at the group-level (e.g., correlations, *t*-tests, rank-order comparisons), which is contrary to the person-oriented emphasis of developmental criminology. The current study examines the stability of sexual offenders' risk for reoffending using P(Δ) and P(Δ_i), two person-oriented analytic strategies for measuring change within groups and within individuals, respectively. These analyses were used to examine the degree of stability or change in scores on the *Community Risk/Needs Assessment* within a random sample of adult males from British Columbia, Canada, all of whom were followed for several years following the perpetration of a sex offense. The results provide a longitudinal perspective on the course of change and/or stability in risk for reoffending, and can help inform practitioners about their client's likelihood of change from their baseline assessment.

Learning Goals:

- Inform the audience about issues and challenges in measuring change in level of risk
- Inform the audience about the value of P(Δ) as a new analytic strategy for simultaneously capturing within-individual and between-person change
- Inform the audience about the degree of group-level and individual-level change in risk within a sample of several hundred adult male sex offenders

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The Dynamic Risk Factors of Entry into Sex Offending and Entry into Sexual Recidivism in Adulthood: A Retrospective-Longitudinal Analysis

Sébastien Brouillette-Alarie, Ph.D

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Université Laval

The scientific literature on risk assessment in the context of sex offending focuses on the risk of sexual recidivism. Criminal justice policies such as sex offender registries, public notification, and residency restrictions aim to deter these individuals from committing another sex crime. Yet, most of the individuals targeted by these policies are not sexual recidivists and have no records of prior convictions for a sex crime. This group, also known as first-time offenders (Duwe, 2012), tend to be known by the criminal justice system due to their involvement in other crime types (e.g., drug trafficking, assault, theft, fraud) (e.g., Lussier, 2005; Smallbone & Wortley, 2004). In spite of representing the most common group of “sex offenders”, very little is known about them and the context prior to their involvement in sex crimes. From a criminal career and life course perspective, it is unclear whether the dynamic risk factors involved in “entry” into sex offending are similar or different from those involved in sexual recidivism – either the first sexual reoffense or subsequent ones. In other words, there is little information regarding whether dynamic risk factors evolve or change across someone’s criminal career. The current study aims to bridge a gap in the scientific literature by examining the dynamic risk factor profiles associated to entry into sex offending vs. entry into sexual recidivism. It is based on a sample of 518 individuals convicted for at least one sex offense in the province of British Columbia, Canada. Their entire criminal and risk assessment histories were coded and analyzed using a life calendar approach from age 18 onwards. Then, risk factors from the Community Risk-Needs Assessment (CRNA; Glackman, Ratel, Swaab, Trytten, & Watts, 2002) were linked to three outcomes: a) entry into sex offending, b) entry into sexual recidivism, and c) subsequent sexual recidivism. Doing so, the current study will evaluate if the predictive validity of dynamic risk factors holds, changes, or fades over the life course.

Learning Goals:

- Provide alternate views on risk assessment using a criminal career, life course perspective
- Verify if the risk factors of breach of conditional release/recidivism are different in groups of offenders convicted and not yet convicted of a sexual crime
- Verify if the risk factors of entry into sexual offending are different than those of sexual recidivism

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Dr. Evan McCuish is an Assistant Professor at Simon Fraser University and is the Project Director of the Incarcerated Serious and Violent Young Offender Study, the largest and longest-running study on young offenders in Canada. His research interests include criminal careers, desistance, developmental criminology, foster care, gang involvement, psychopathy, sexual offending, and violence. His work is published in the *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health*, *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, *Justice Quarterly*, and *Journal of Criminal Justice*.

Dr. Patrick Lussier is a Professor of criminology at the School of social work and criminology at Université Laval, in Quebec City, Canada. He is a researcher at the Centre International de Criminologie Comparée (CICC) and the Centre de Recherche Universitaire sur les Jeunes et les Familles (CRUJeF). Professor Lussier has more than 130 publications related to developmental life course criminology, sexual offending, risk assessment/management, community reentry and reintegration, and criminal justice policy. His work has been published in journals such as *Aggression and Violence*, *Criminology*, *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *Journal of Criminal Justice*, *Justice Quarterly*, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*. Professor Lussier is also the assistant editor of the *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*.

Sébastien Brouillette-Alarie (PhD) is a postdoctoral candidate at the Université Laval, under the supervision of Patrick Lussier. He has published peer-reviewed articles on the latent structure of risk scales for sexual offenders, sexual sadism, the offending process of hebephiles, and psychopathy among women. His current research interests are about the etiology of risk in sexual offenders and criminal desistance.