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2018 ATSA Conference | Thursday October 18 | 3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

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Deepening Our Understanding of Dynamic Risk: Theory and Practice

Symposium Chair: David S. Prescott, LICSW
Becket Family of Services

The recruitment of dynamic risk factors to explain crime, formulate cases, and set treatment targets is now standard practice in the sexual offending area. Unfortunately, dynamic risk factors are predictive, composite constructs not explanatory ones, and therefore cannot be used on their own to explain crime-related phenomena or to directly guide treatment. In this symposium, we will first outline and discuss the conceptual problems and introduce a model of *predictive agency* that encourages a deeper understanding of the *causes* of crime and desistence. Next, we present a novel conceptual framework -the *Risk-Causality Method* – that is designed to divide the task of inferring the possible causes of offending related problems into three distinct phases.

Building on the first two papers of this symposium, we then further explore how risk and protective factors act as proxies for dynamic processes. Using case examples, we will highlight different processes underlying risk and protective factors found in commonly used risk assessment tools and the recently developed Structured Assessment of Protective Factors for violence risk – Sexual Offending version (SAPROF-SO). The presenters will illustrate how understanding the processes that underlie risk and protective factors is crucial for treatment planning and delivery, and discuss implications for the future of risk assessment practice.

Towards an Integrated Theory of Dynamic Risk, Protective Factors, and Agency

Roxanne Heffernan, MSc FPSY, PhD Candidate
Tony Ward, PhD, Dip Clin Psych
Victoria University of Wellington

The current conceptualization of dynamic risk factors (DRF) for criminal offending is vague and incoherent. Similar conceptual issues apply to “protective factors” (PF), which are frequently defined as the opposite of DRF; factors that *reduce* rather than *increase* risk of reoffending. While these factors are useful markers to guide risk prediction, these conceptual problems limit their utility in explanations of crime, and in treatment programmes aiming to

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target the causes of offending. Two important and challenging questions arise: 1) what exactly are these risk-related features? And 2) how do they relate to each other and criminal behaviour? We will first outline and discuss the conceptual problems, and then introduce a model of *predictive agency* that encourages a deeper understanding of the *causes* of crime and desistence.

Learning Goals:

- Understand the conceptual problems with dynamic risk and protective factors, and how these may impact upon theoretical work and treatment.
- Understand the role that these constructs can play in explanations of offending.
- Consider how the Predictive Agency Model can be used to link dynamic risk factors with goal-directed behavior.

Incorporating Dynamic Risk Factors into Case Formulations: The Risk-Causality Method

Tony Ward, PhD, Dip Clin Psych
Roxanne Heffernan, MSc FPSY, PhD Candidate
Victoria University of Wellington

The recruitment of dynamic risk factors to explain crime, formulate cases, and set treatment targets is now standard practice in the sexual offending area. Unfortunately, dynamic risk factors are predictive, composite constructs not explanatory ones, and therefore cannot be used on their own to explain crime related phenomena or to directly guide treatment. In this paper we present a novel conceptual framework -the *Risk-Causality Method* – that is designed to divide the task of inferring the possible causes of offending related problems into three distinct phases: identification, analysis, and reintegration. After outlining this method, we take the example of emotional congruence to illustrate how it can be used to break risk factors into their components in order to better inform the assessment and treatment of individuals convicted of sexual offences.

Learning Goals:

- Understand the need for conceptual analysis of dynamic risk factors, both for the advancement of theory and to inform practice.
- Understand the Risk-Causality Method and how it may be applied to dynamic risk factors.
- Consider how this might influence your own practice.

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Processes and Practices: Understanding the Client

Gwenda M. Willis, PhD, PGDipClinPsyc
University of Auckland
David S. Prescott, LICSW
Becket Family of Services

Building on the first two papers of this symposium, this presentation further explores how risk and protective factors act as proxies for dynamic processes. Using case examples, we will highlight different processes underlying risk and protective factors found in commonly used risk assessment tools and the recently developed Structured Assessment of Protective Factors for violence risk – Sexual Offending version (SAPROF-SO). The presenters will illustrate how understanding the processes that underlie risk and protective factors is crucial for treatment planning and delivery, and discuss implications for the future of risk assessment practice.

Learning Goals:

Participants will:

- Learn about ways to reframe factors into the processes that they consist of.
- Learn about ways that risk and protective processes might interact.
- Use case examples to illustrate these ideas.

David Prescott, LICSW is co-author on two primary texts and several chapters and articles regarding the good lives and self-regulation models. He is the 2014 recipient of ATSA's Distinguished Contribution award (one of only a handful of recipients) and a past ATSA President. He is a Senior Associate and Certified Trainer for the International Center for Clinical Excellence and a member of the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers. He currently lectures around the world, with recent and upcoming presentations and consultations in Germany, Norway, Holland, Australia, Namibia, Italy, and Eastern Europe.

Roxanne Heffernan, MSc FPSY, PhD Candidate

Roxanne is a graduate of the Forensic Psychology Masters programme at Victoria University of Wellington, and after working in the forensic field has returned to continue her research as a Doctoral Candidate. Having experienced the complexities of working with offenders in treatment aiming to reduce risk, she is passionate about integrating and advancing theory in this field. Roxanne's aim is to develop a comprehensive theory that can explain offending and risk factors as variation and dysfunction in the capacities required for adaptive goal directed behavior. It is expected that this will enhance correctional practice in a number of ways.

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Tony Ward, PhD, Dip Clin Psych

Tony is currently Professor of Clinical Psychology at Victoria University of Wellington and has previously taught forensic and clinical psychology at the universities of Melbourne, Deakin, and Canterbury. His current research projects include: (a) explanation and inquiry in research and practice. This includes the nature of protective and dynamic risk factors and their theoretical grounding in embodied agency; (b) normative issues in forensic and clinical practice including restorative justice and therapeutic jurisprudence; and (c) change processes in the psychopathology and forensic/correctional domains.

Gwenda M. Willis, Ph.D, PGDipClinPsyc is a Clinical Psychologist and researcher from New Zealand; she has worked in clinical and research capacities in New Zealand, Australia and North America. In 2011, she was awarded a Fulbright Senior Scholar award to evaluate applications of the Good Lives Model in sexual offending treatment programs in North America. Since this time she has written extensively on the application of the Good Lives Model and provided training and program consultation in prisons and community-based settings internationally. Dr Willis is also a co-author of the newly developed Structured Assessment of Protective Factors for violence risk – Sexual Offending version (SAPROF-SO; Willis, Thornton, Kelley & de Vries Robbè).