

SHAPING THE FUTURE

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Adopting the Five-Level Risk and Needs System Using the VASOR-2

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Criminal justice professionals now use a wide range of risk and needs instruments to inform appropriate correctional and forensic mental health interventions. However, there are no agreed upon standards for categorizing individuals' levels of risk and needs. Practices vary widely. For example, whereas some instruments summarize individuals' risk and needs using three categories, others use four or five categories (e.g., low, low-moderate, moderate, moderate-high, high). Furthermore, there are no commonly accepted definitions about what any of these labels mean, such as what probability of reoffending is associated with various labels.

To address the lack of a common language among risk and needs instruments, the Council of State Governments Justice Center convened working groups of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers. These convenings resulted in the development of and recommendations for risk instrument authors to adopt the Five-Level Risk and Needs System (Hanson, Bourgon, McGrath, et al, 2017). This system is designed to help criminal justice professionals improve supervision and treatment services by communicating about people clearly and consistently, regardless of the jurisdiction where the assessment is conducted or the instrument that is used.

This poster will describe the process, results, and advantages of adopting the Five-Level Risk and Needs System using the Vermont Assessment of Sex Offender Risk-2 (VASOR-2: McGrath, Lasher, Cumming, Langton, & Hoke, 2013). The VASOR-2 is an actuarial instrument designed to assess sexual recidivism risk and offense severity of adult males known to have committed at least one sexual offense. Analyses were conducted on four samples comprised of 1,581 individuals.

Michael P. Lasher, Ph.D. is a clinical psychologist practicing in the Not Guilty By Reason of Insanity program at Eastern State Hospital in Williamsburg, VA. In addition to Virginia, he has worked in correctional and secure psychiatric mental health, primarily with individuals who sexually offend, in Michigan, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont. He is also involved in research, including the study tracking treatment progress, interprofessional relationships, and sex offender risk assessment methods. His work includes the co-development of the SOTIPS and VASOR-2 risk assessment instruments.

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Calvin M. Langton, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Windsor, Canada. He is registered as a clinical and forensic psychologist in Ontario and is also a chartered psychologist in the UK. He works with children, adolescents, and adults. His research program focuses on applied and theoretical issues relevant to the causes and correlates of sexually exploitative and assaultive behaviors, risk and protective factors for types of interpersonal aggression, and various assessment and treatment issues with adolescents involved in the youth justice and children's mental health systems as well as adults in the correctional and forensic mental health systems.

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