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# **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH ON RISK ASSESSMENT FOR TARGETED VIOLENCE PREVENTION**

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Coalized Efforts to Enhance Risk Assessment  
Workshop Proceedings

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### Authorship

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# Executive Summary

The [Community Safety Evaluation Lab \(CSE-Lab\)](#), at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, in collaboration with the [Canadian Practitioners Network for the Prevention of Extremist Violence \(CPN-PREV\)](#) and the [Department of Homeland Security Science & Technology Directorate](#) hosted a workshop entitled “Coalized Efforts to Enhance Research and Practice in Risk Assessment” at McGill University in Montréal, Québec on May 30<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> 2024 as part of the fifth international conference on countering radicalization to violence (CRV) organized by Public Safety's Canada Centre. The workshop focused on developing recommendations for future research in risk assessment, providing an opportunity to discuss risk assessment tools, context, and processes. Over forty experts in mental health, terrorism and probation were in attendance, including practitioners, government officials, and researchers. The group discussion was guided using the PARIHS (Promoting Action on Research Implementation in Health Services) knowledge translation framework.<sup>1</sup> The PARIHS framework is a conceptual framework used in implementation science to describe the factors associated with the success of an intervention in practice. This knowledge translation framework suggests that the successful implementation of any program or intervention is influenced by three key factors: evidence, context, and facilitation. These three elements were used to discuss how processes and contexts impact risk assessment purposes and outcomes. The workshop was conducted using interactive audience engagement techniques, including anonymous polls and audio-generated transcripts run through large language models (LLM) via AI Sandbox for Harvard. The LLM outputs were used to summarize the discussions and gather immediate feedback and consensus from the participants. Participants developed key recommendations to strengthen research in this area including: focusing future studies on the purpose of risk assessment across a variety of settings, further validating and improving existing tools to reflect more recent knowledge on individuals' risks and protective factors, better describe current implementation process and test the ability of the tools and processes to measure change and pre-identified outcomes overtime, determine the type of training and educational background and system level partnerships across sectors that are required for an effective risk assessment and develop mechanisms between researchers and practitioners to ensure access to better quality data across a variety of settings.

# Complex and evolving constructs

Risk assessment is a complex and evolving field when tasked with measuring both violent extremism and the more generic construct of violence. Over time, the approach to risk assessment in this field has evolved from actuarial assessments to the more widely used structured *professional judgment models*. This transition emphasizes the measurement challenges of this complex construct. Violent extremism has been described extensively in the published literature, including the description of numerous tools and instruments assessing a broad array of outcomes, such as recidivism.<sup>2</sup>

To describe the challenges of existing measurement approaches related to this field of work, we have leveraged artificial intelligence (AI) to identify and examine a sample of existing risk-assessment instruments to determine their field of application and measurement properties. By doing so, we realized that the many instruments developed since the early 1990's represent a growing heterogeneity of outcomes and constructs. From a sample of 65 instruments identified using AI and cross-referenced checks, we identified over 30 different constructs under the general umbrella of violent extremism, including historical and clinical risk factors, ideological and behavioral indicators, and protective factors, to name only a few.

During our search, gaining access to individual risk assessment tools was challenging. While papers describing the tools' development, and their psychometric properties are readily available, in-depth evaluation is difficult due to limited access to the tools. Evaluating whether a specific tool would be 'fit-to-purpose' based on the context and population to which it is applied relies primarily on papers published by the developers themselves, or by other researchers enumerating the pros and cons for using the instruments<sup>3</sup>, but not direct evaluation of the tools and instruments.

There are many risk assessment instruments review articles in the published literature. We selected 13 review articles to examine the scope and breadth of the instruments and constructs described in greater detail. These 13 reviews were published between 2005 and 2024 and authored by researchers from six countries (United States, Canada, United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Scotland and

Australia). The reviews appeared in journals from various disciplines, including criminal justice, social science, psychology, and law. In total, 55 risk-assessment tools were included, compared, or mentioned in the 13 review articles (See Table 1 in Appendix). The constructs measured included violence, extremism, violent extremism, recidivism, violent recidivism, and terrorism. The application and purpose of these tools ranged from risk prediction to risk management. The lack of overlap of the measurement domains used to develop the instruments was evident and reflected the lack of consensus on the underlying constructs. The ERG22+, HCR-20, TRAP-18, and VERA 2 were the most frequently referenced risk assessment instruments reported in the reviews. These four instruments are examples of structured professional judgment approaches and, while widely used, they are also the subject of critical review regarding their psychometric properties and applications in various practice contexts.

Knowledge of the underlying construct being measured is critical to evaluate the performance of any measurement instrument. Moreover, there must be consensus on the definition of that construct. A measurement instrument cannot achieve construct validity otherwise. It is clear from the current literature that not only is there no universally accepted definition of either violence or violent extremism, but even these definitions are not stable. The conceptualization of these constructs has evolved and the literature on risk assessment reflects this critical temporal measurement issue. Temporal issues are even more relevant today with the rapid development of new technologies. With such technologies, violence and violent extremism can manifest in ever-changing ways, prevailing in both natural and virtual space. Risk assessment instruments need to adapt to an ever-evolving context of exposure and risks.<sup>4</sup>

During the workshop, it was emphasized that process factors beyond psychometric properties are equally important. As Paul Gill mentioned during the discussion, assessing and managing the risk of violence has evolved significantly over the past 25 years. While a substantial body of literature covers the psychometric properties of assessment tools, there needs to be more information about the corresponding implementation processes, particularly those concerning the user experience and the practical realities of risk assessment. For instance, if one establishes a new team to conduct risk assessments, more than guidance on how to proceed is required. As Gill noted, "I would probably rather

have a terribly validated tool with a very well-trained staff rather than the opposite." This statement suggested that training can compensate for a tool's lack of validity, and processes are as important as the tools themselves. It also highlights the importance of equipping staff with the necessary skills and knowledge.

Despite the extensive published literature, the goals of these risk assessment tool, and related processes still need to be clarified. Is the primary aim to reduce individuals' recidivism or protect society from potential threats? Or is it to provide those working with violent extremists' peace of mind that a comprehensive assessment was conducted? And how does risk assessment provide those managing specific individuals with a way to determine what resources are needed to manage the risk? Further clarity on these objectives is essential for effective risk assessment and related management processes.



# Workshop methodology

The Promoting Action on Research Implementation in Health Services (PARIHS) PARIHS framework<sup>5</sup> was adopted to develop the workshop agenda and guide the discussions because of its breadth of definitions related to the concept of evidence and context. This framework emphasizes that evidence can vary along a spectrum, from weak to strong, and so can the context in which the evidence is applied. A point that resonated strongly during the participants' discussions was the idea that a robust process and knowledgeable personnel are often more valuable than the tools being used—highlighting the significance of a strong context. The PARIHS framework is a “multi-dimensional framework used in implementation science to guide the analysis of the key elements that impact the implementation of any intervention. The PARIHS framework describes the success of an implementation (SI) as a function (f) of the nature and type of evidence (E) - derived from research or practice experience), the qualities of the context (C) of implementation (leadership, organizational culture and evaluation activities), and how the implementation process is facilitated (F). The formula is  $SI = f(E, C, F)$ ”<sup>VI</sup>.

As noted during the workshop, implementation science is applied when sufficient evidence already exists, and the focus shifts to evaluating the intervention from its development and efficacy results obtained in a research environment to its effectiveness in the real world. However, it is worth noting that in some fields, as is the case of targeted violence research, the strength of evidence may still be developing, or the severity of the situation and potential risks encountered are of a such magnitude that practice decisions prevail on the need to acquire further evidence. The PARIHS framework – see Figure 1 - not only recognizes that evidence can be derived from experience but also that context includes a spectrum of options. Evidence within the PARIHS framework is not limited to empirical data from research, but also includes the insights and experiences of practitioners. In many areas of practice, especially in medicine, interventions are often adopted based on practical experience and observed efficacy without requiring experimental designs. This underscores the role of experiential knowledge as an integral component of evidence.



Similarly, context encompasses several elements, including leadership, culture, and evaluation. More specifically, participants discussed how leadership is critical in driving risk assessment processes forward, considering a balance between existing procedures and the cost effectiveness of introducing new tools and interventions. Additionally, the culture of an organization—particularly a culture of improvement and accountability—plays a pivotal role in supporting effective implementation. Many leaders/managers have limited or no knowledge in this specialized area that is needed to drive projects and often depend only on those they have delegated to this area. Staff changes also bring major setbacks due to a lack of succession planning and failures to pass along institutional knowledge. In addition, competing interests, changing priorities and funding can also hinder advancements.

Regular evaluation and data collection during the implementation of risk

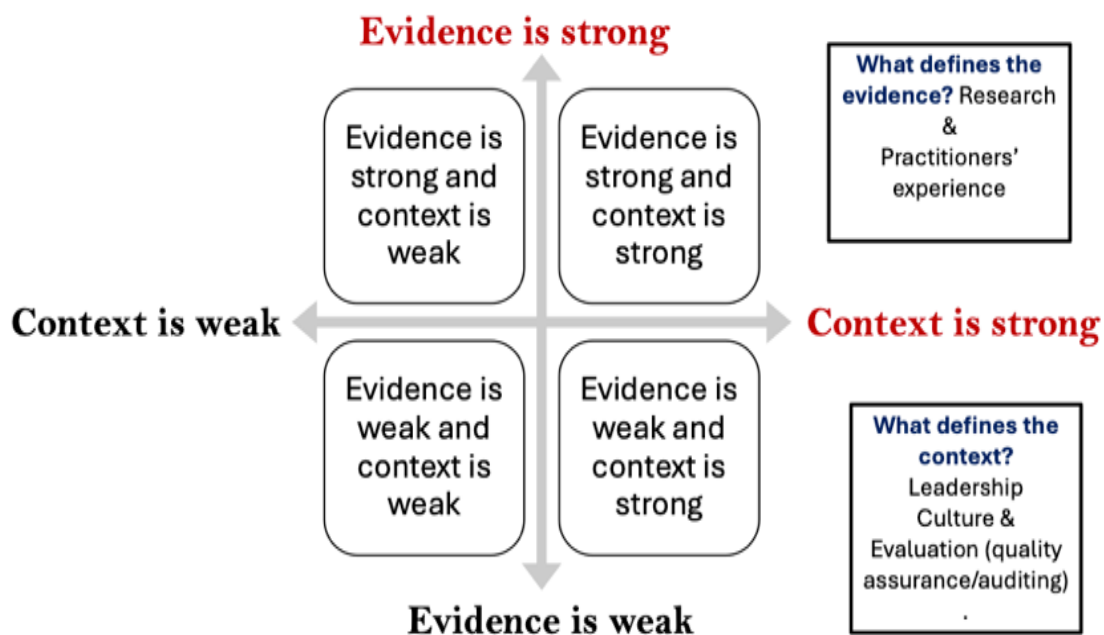


Figure 1 PARiSH framework

assessment processes, regardless of the tools and methods being used, further reinforce this culture, promoting government transparency, continuous

improvement and accountability. Furthermore, processes need to be facilitated and the responsibilities and skills of the person or organization promoting risk assessment processes play a critical role in the quality of the implementation activities and success of the process itself. The interplay between these elements—evidence, context, and facilitation—highlights the complex nature of risk assessment processes and underscores the need for a holistic approach to drive successful outcomes. These three elements were used to discuss how processes and contexts impact risk assessment purposes and outcomes. The methodology to conduct the workshop consisted of an interactive process, including anonymous polls and audio generated transcripts run through large language models (LLM) via AI Sandbox for Harvard. The LLM outputs were used to summarize the discussions and gather immediate feedback and consensus from the participants.



# Purpose, Processes, and Context in Risk-Assessment

The workshop began with reflections on the purpose of risk assessment, highlighting its use in both law enforcement and therapeutic contexts. It was noted that risk assessment tools, when developed for law enforcement officers, serve a different purpose than when used by therapists. For instance, in therapy, when a client shares grievances or childhood traumas, it typically signifies the development of a trustworthy relationship between the client and the therapist. This trust can indicate a reduction in perceived risk. However, if the information shared by the client is integrated into a risk assessment process, the client's risk might be rated as higher compared to someone who remains more reserved.

For social workers and therapists, the primary focus is supporting the client, while law enforcement prioritizes the protection of society. Both are required for the dual role of pretrial, probation, and parole officers. Therapists must be transparent about the information they collect and how it is used to build trustworthy relationships which are at the base of a successful therapy. On the contrary, law enforcement agents frequently conduct their investigation in secrecy. Both roles are crucial in addressing and preventing extremist violence, but it's essential to delineate their functions and boundaries and clearly determine what information can be shared, as blending these roles can lead to dysfunction in both systems. One significant issue is the absence of clear thresholds and criteria for information sharing between law enforcement and therapists. While therapists are required to report certain matters to child protection agencies, their obligations to the criminal justice system vary significantly across different countries. Interestingly, countries lacking these reporting duties often offer a broader array of social services and comprehensive social work programs generating a safety net around individuals at risk. These countries have focused on establishing the necessary services and funding to support this approach.

Understanding the role of context is crucial in risk assessment, particularly in assessing violent radicalization and extremism. These assessments are shaped by numerous factors, both psychological and environmental. Psychological elements

can significantly impact assessments and human interactions during an interview. The presentation of evidence and other stimuli matter because they can provoke various emotional and cognitive responses in the interviewer and interviewee. For instance, confirmation bias – the tendency to interpret new information in a way that validates one's existing beliefs – and the context of memory retrieval can heavily influence judgement. Interpersonal dynamics involving the behavior of the interviewer, and the perception held by the interviewee also play critical roles. How an individual feels when answering questions can affect their responses. For example, an individual's current mood can color their perceptions and thus, their answers. Additionally, social desirability bias – the responding in a manner that is likely to be seen favorably by others – can lead to inaccuracies in the representation of their true opinions or behaviors. In addition, advice or scripting by legal counsel in active criminal cases can drastically effect responses and assessments.

As mentioned above, the principal approach used in risk assessment is structural professional judgment. This approach is neither a psychological test nor an actuarial instrument but relies on professional judgment within a structured framework. The context in which professionals perceive and interpret indicators can be significant. Various contextual effects may influence accuracy, especially when the professional interacts frequently with the individual being assessed to the point of establishing a personal relationship with expectations on their behavior.

Several critical questions should guide the planning of risk assessment processes, including *how contextual factors influence assessment of violent radicalization/extremism* and *how context effects can alter assessments of these phenomena*. There are several factors that can affect survey and interview responses, and should always be considered in the implementation process, including:

- Framing Effects: The wording and framing of questions can shape interpretations and responses.
- Scale Effects: Response scale attributes, such as the number of options and midpoint inclusion, impact responses.

- Priming Effects: Exposure to specific words or ideas beforehand can unconsciously influence responses.
- Mood Effects: Current mood states can color perceptions and answers.
- Desirability Bias: The desire to answer questions in a socially favorable manner can influence results.

During interviews and interrogations, various factors can influence assessments and should be taken into consideration, including:

- Room Layout: Physical arrangement can affect power dynamics.
- Comfort Level: A comfortable setting may encourage cooperation.
- Social Issues: The rapport, relationship-building, and interaction style (collaboration vs. confrontation) are crucial.
- Trust and Empathy: Collaborative efforts can lead to more openness, while adversarial interactions may hinder cooperation.

Environmental and situational factors play an important role. Access to weapons or materials is a significant risk factor that must be considered in risk assessment. A holistic assessment considers both individual and situational dynamics to gauge the risk accurately. Training settings and the manner of presenting information can introduce cognitive biases. In interviews, specific context effects are essential. For questionnaire-based assessments, establishing validity is crucial. Validity refers to accurately measuring the construct in question, particularly for subjective or latent variables. Other external influences are part of the context threat assessment construct, including:

- Holistic Contextual Factors: Threat assessments must account for various environmental factors including:
- Physical Surroundings: These can influence behavior and decision-making.
- Cultural Norms: Shared norms foster belonging and understanding.
- Social Structures: These impact interactions and decisions.
- Political Dynamics: They affect feelings of security and civic engagement.
- Economic Conditions: These determine choices and priorities.

Understanding spatial and temporal contexts is also crucial. A high-crime neighborhood, for instance, may present different threats compared to a gated

community. Historical contexts, even if not currently active, can significantly influence dynamics.

In summary, context heavily influences risk-assessments in various ways, from individual psychological states to broader social and environmental factors. Ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the contextual elements involved in the implementation process can lead to more accurate results and better responses.

The workshop continued focusing on 3 major contexts (judicial, school and therapeutic) to identify key challenges, experiences and solutions related to risk assessment across contexts.

# Risk assessment in the school setting

In recent years, the educational landscape has been evolving to better address the safety and support needs of students, while simultaneously managing external pressures and stigma. In-school setting threat assessment is the most common approach. While risk assessments aim to evaluate and comprehend how vulnerable an individual might be to radicalization, targeted violence, or terrorism, threat assessments are specifically designed to gauge the immediacy of danger, such as determining whether an individual poses an immediate threat to themselves or others. Additionally, needs assessments are conducted to identify the necessary treatments and services that could enhance the individual's well-being and strengthen their resilience against radicalization, targeted violence, and terrorism.

In the school setting, threat assessments are typically the only approach in place and security is a priority. However, the workshop participants emphasized the importance of managing the consequences of a threat assessment. It was noted that expelling students with behavioral issues often leads to a false sense of security. By doing so, it is easy to lose track of these students, increasing the potential risks they pose once unsupervised. On the contrary, keeping these students within the school system allows for effective monitoring and interventions, creating a safer environment for the entire school community. To accurately gauge and address students' needs, a variety of risk assessment tools are employed. Staff dedicated to these processes may be trained to use TRAP-18, CYRM, ARM, suicide assessment kits, and more. The co-existence of different measurement approaches highlights the complexity of the behaviors and risks being examined in any given situation.

During threat assessment processes, communication is key. Schools need to enhance their capabilities to foster effective dialogue with all stakeholders, including administrators and parents. In some cases, the

terminology being used becomes pivotal to the success of a program. For example, participants agreed that it is more appropriate to talk about "levels of concern" rather than "risks," which helps reduce anxiety and stigma, and talk about student support teams rather than threat assessment teams, aiming to foster a more supportive and less judgmental environment. Despite these efforts, schools frequently face pressure from concerned parents to expel troublesome students.

Participants manifested wide consensus that no single tool can capture every nuance of this issue, especially students who may not exhibit clear risk factors. A holistic and comprehensive approach to threat assessment in the school environment ensures a thorough evaluation. Central to the success of threat assessment processes is the existence of a multidisciplinary team. By fostering relationships with law enforcement, other schools, and institutions, it is possible to establish a network of support and procedures to handle similar cases across school districts. Protocols like VTRA (Violence Threat Risk Assessment) ensure that all stakeholders respond uniformly in times of need. Intervention strategies need to be designed to provide comprehensive support, addressing the root causes of concerning behaviors and helping students integrate successfully. Furthermore, participants discussed the importance of continuous quality improvement efforts. Participants agreed that it is essential for staff to undergo regular training on emerging trends and the use of new assessment tools, ensuring that they stay current and implement structured professional judgments effectively.

Building trust with students ("clients") remains paramount. Transparent and flexible approaches facilitate better engagement, this is essential especially when working within strict governmental frameworks that often start with low initial trust levels. Information sharing procedures need to be managed in compliance with privacy laws. Informed consent is always obtained before sharing the details of a threat assessment with other agencies, balancing the need for necessary information while maintaining



the critical trust of students and the overall community around them. Looking ahead, it is important to develop adaptable tools and protocols to keep pace with the evolving nature of threats, ensuring that the school remains a safe and supportive environment for all its students.



# Risk assessment in the therapeutic setting

The discussion revolved around various approaches and challenges in the field of risk and threat assessment, particularly in the context of programs like [SHIFT](#) in British Columbia and [Yorktown's ETA](#) program in Toronto, which are involved in collaborative public safety efforts.

The SHIFT approach includes a small team of social workers, analysts, and a clinician, working under a specific model to collaborate with community organizations and different government sectors. Participants working for this program highlighted the importance of differentiating threat assessment from risk assessment. Threat assessment is primarily handled by law enforcement and addresses immediate safety concerns. In contrast, risk assessment involves creating intervention plans based on factors affecting participants' resilience, using models like the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-R) and the Adult Resilience Measure (ARM-R), self-report measures of social-ecological resilience<sup>1</sup>. The goal of the SHIFT program is to address vulnerabilities rather than merely assigning risk scores. Once again, the importance of context in risk assessment was emphasized, advocating for responsive and collaborative approaches to create personalized intervention plans. This approach requires the involvement of clients in the process, ensuring their buy-in, trust and cooperation.

Participants discussed the operational framework of Yorktown's ETA program, which focuses on broader mental health services with a trained team covering Toronto and Ontario. Participants discussed how the program faces challenges in assessing and addressing the risks posed by various clientele, including those without obvious risk factors. Continuous training and awareness of current trends are deemed vital for the staff to adapt to evolving challenges. The complexities involved in working with diverse clients were also noted, some of whom may not fit traditional risk

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<sup>1</sup> For more information visit: <https://resilienceresearch.org/home-cyrm/>

profiles. The importance of context was stressed and the need for staff to be trained well enough to adapt tools “on the fly”, as only a portion of their clients can engage and be seen in an office or a structured environment.

Participants agreed on the necessity of differentiating between threat and risk assessments and the significance of context in evaluations. They highlighted the challenges of engaging with clients referred by police and the need for effective tools and frameworks to address risks without stigmatizing or labeling individuals, particularly in the school system where services might be inadequate. The conversation also touched upon the collaborative aspect of existing programs and therapeutic interventions and the importance of protocols that bring various stakeholders together to address concerns without defaulting on the criminal justice system for solutions. Participants advocated for a clear framework to manage threats and risks effectively, ensuring all relevant parties (i.e. psychologists, law enforcement officers, social workers) work together for the best outcomes. The need for continuous training and adaptation to new trends was emphasized, along with the importance of context and individualized approaches in intervention plans. Participants called for better leadership and collaboration among institutions to manage threats more holistically and prevent escalation into criminal matters.

Overall, the dialogue underscored the complexity and challenges in the fields of risk and threat assessment, emphasizing the need for nuanced, context-sensitive approaches that prioritize effective intervention and client engagement over rigid, score-based assessments.

## Risk assessment in the judicial setting

**Quality assurance processes:** A perspective from the UK, with direct reference to the use of the ERG22+ highlighted the delivery models and

quality assurance processes necessary to support probation officers and mental health providers in conducting risk assessments. The importance of the processes that "surround the tool" was, once again, emphasized as being equally, if not more, important than the tool itself.

Regarding delivery models, it was discussed how it is crucial for practitioners to demonstrate they meet a required threshold of training before they use risk-assessment tools independently. The existence of such training requirements provides assurances to ministers and senior government officials that their teams are qualified to conduct such processes and meet required standards. However, training is only a component of quality assurance and continuous support is essential. It is worth noting that in the UK there is a designated group of officers that are trained in this type of risk assessment processes.

The Counterterrorism Assessment and Rehabilitation Centre (CTARC) within Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service has developed and implemented a quality assurance (QA) framework to monitor risk assessments conducted using the ERG22+. This applies to individuals convicted of terrorism charges who receive an evaluation within six months of release, as well as individuals with no charges but who are flagged due to concerns of potential radicalization. Developing appropriate delivery models is essential, but so too is the implementation of QA processes to review the quality of tasks and services against set criteria or guidance. QA includes creating guidance documents, manuals, and training. Monitoring training needs, the appropriateness and clarity of guidance tools, and developing feedback loops are vital to identifying gaps and implementing improvements at both the system and individual levels. When monitoring these processes, data is gathered both retrospectively and in real-time during the assessment. Furthermore, appropriate training for QA personnel is necessary to ensure consistency in applying the QA processes. Each year, QA staff members attend three workshops where they apply QA to various case studies to ensure consistent application. This training is an absolute

requirement to be able to serve as an assessor. The QA focuses on how the ERG22+ factors were assessed, the level of evidence behind the judgements, the formulation of risk, and the proper identification of risk and protective factors. It also evaluates responsivity factors to determine any plan for action. The goal is to ensure evidence-based and reliable assessments. There is a significant burden of responsibility not only for the practitioners conducting the assessments but also for the assurers monitoring them. It was emphasized that when building any type of QA process, it is crucial to foster a quality improvement culture where identifying inconsistencies or areas for improvement is seen not as punitive but as part of a system improvement effort.

**Sharing of information:** Information sharing capabilities have been discussed as being at the core of risk-assessment processes, emphasizing the importance of developing a seamless flow of information between all individuals managing the case from pre-trial, to incarceration and probation as appropriate. It is necessary to create a comprehensive continuum of information flow to ensure the risk-assessment process is built upon a wide range of information so that it is possible to establish an appropriate link between levels of risk and availability of services. To support a holistic and multidisciplinary approach for the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of criminal violent extremists into society it is necessary to develop comprehensive and effective information sharing capabilities.

The judicial system, which includes pretrial, probation, and parole officers, faces unique challenges at different phases. These challenges arise when officers are consulted to recommend release or detention conditions for defendants pending trial, pretrial supervision conditions for those being released, and appropriate sentencing recommendations. Developing special supervision conditions, community monitoring practices, and surveillance measures is essential to protect the community, facilitate

disengagement from violent extremism, and ensure a smooth rehabilitation and reintegration process.

For cases of criminal violent extremism, there is a need for specialized information that exceeds the usual type collected for typical rehabilitation and reintegration processes. The quality of risk and needs assessments, case planning, and supervision activities depend on the quality of the information being gathered since the first encounter with the individual and shared across agencies. Information flow should commence at the time of arrest and continue throughout the pretrial process, sentencing process, and community supervision process. It is crucial to align these processes within a continuous framework of information sharing and integrated delivery of services using a multidisciplinary approach.

Every interaction, from the time of arrest or first contact until the end of the case management process, matters. Those working on the case must coordinate a close-knit, individualized case plan that may include mental health providers, counselors, halfway house staff, law enforcement officers, and social service workers. Establishing communication between the professionals managing the case across various phases, as well as with experts at the national level, is vital for discussing challenges and solutions in case management. Networking opportunities at the local and national levels for sharing experience and knowledge are also essential. There is a need to develop information sharing protocols and allow for this communication to open in a safe and appropriate manner overpassing current restrictions.

The continuum of information sharing is at the base of the creation of a continuum of services from the time of arrest throughout successful reintegration of the individual into the community. This requires developing interagency communications between all agencies and departments involved in the process, including law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, probation and parole officers, parole board officials, correctional staff,

social services, and treatment providers. It was also stressed the importance of the Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) model<sup>6</sup>, highlighting that beyond risk and needs assessment, responsivity is essential. Understanding what interventions will make a difference and what these activities look like is crucial for focusing the risk assessment process that leads to effective risk management.

**Leadership decisions based on risks and resources:** Risk assessment in the judicial setting was also discussed from a U.S. federal level leadership perspective, talking about the decision-making process behind current strategies focused on maximizing support to probation officers limiting additional burden on current practices. Data collection efforts under the current administration show that at any given time there are about 180,000 people within the U.S. federal judicial system under some type of supervision. And a workforce of 6,000 pretrial and probation officers. At any given time, it is estimated that there may be 500 extremists within the entire population of individuals under probation, corresponding to 3 people for every 1000 supervisees. Consequently, these types of cases do not represent a priority group due to their low numbers and because their risk profile does not seem to be higher than other individuals. It was emphasized that risk assessment is extremely important in the judicial context because it is used to guide actions and the amount of time that an officer needs to allocate based on the level of risk posed by an individual. However, before introducing new risk assessment tools in current probation practice, it is important to understand if current tools used for the general population of individuals under probation, like the PICRA, are applicable to this population before recommending the need to add additional tools and how to do so. From a preliminary analysis on the use of the PICRA to assess these cases it seems that the tool has construct validity and can discriminate levels of risk among individuals based on a priori hypothesis. Yet, data are limited, and in absence of evidence the chosen approach is to strengthen the context around the management of these cases by enhancing access to mental health providers who are knowledgeable

about this population and trained on the use of the tools. It remains the probation officer's responsibility to function as a gatekeeper and determine a need for further assessments, beyond the use of the PICRA, and facilitate access to resources within an outside the judicial system so that qualified contractors can perform more specific evaluations.





# Recommendations for future research on risk-assessment tools and processes

As described in this report, current literature and practice perspectives on risk assessment tools and related implementation processes indicate a lack of validity in the use of these tools to predict whether an individual will commit an act of terrorism or engage in criminal violent extremist activities.

During the workshop, participants engaged in a brainstorming session and independently responded to an online anonymous poll to identify priorities for future research in risk assessment. The responses were then analyzed using SandBox, an AI tool that enables access to seven different large language models, to identify common themes, which were subsequently presented to the participants for final discussion. Finally, the research team recorded the discussion and analyzed the transcript to further interpret the AI generated themes. Below we describe the major points of discussion and provide the results on the participants' recommendations for future research in this field.

Participants were first encouraged to discuss what research questions or methods could enhance existing risk assessment tools and processes. The discussions delved into the need to examine the usefulness of risk assessment tools when used by teams of practitioners, rather than individual practitioners, and their role in improving risk management practices. A significant part of the conversation was dedicated to understanding the extent to which risk-assessment tools can be used to structure or delegate professional judgment. The discussion then shifted focus to the training required (type of training and frequency) for using the tools. Participants emphasized the need for practitioners to receive adequate training and have sufficient time to carry out effective risk and needs assessments. Proper training equips practitioners with the necessary skills and knowledge,

while sufficient time allows them to conduct thorough and accurate assessments. The importance of training was emphasized, along with the development of quality assurance processes surrounding their implementation. The necessity and frequency of training, particularly in agencies with high staff turnover like police forces, was highlighted. Concerns were raised about maintaining the quality of implementation with the high turnover of staff.

Emphasis was placed on the necessity for professionals to comprehend the limitations of specific tools and use their judgment in selecting the most appropriate tool or eventually the most appropriate tool component for a given situation. Participants highlighted the importance of understanding the tools' characteristics and limitations based on the setting and time of the assessment, emphasizing lack of evidence on the difference between the use of a tool during a first encounter with the client versus re-assessments, especially in tertiary settings. Participants discussed the multiplicity of outcomes and dimensions, and what they named “crossover risk” between violence, suicide, and intimidation revealing the need for research on instruments addressing mixed outcomes.

Participants discussed several key aspects of improving data access and quality for risk assessment. Discussions centered around strategies to enhance data access for both researchers and practitioners, emphasizing the fact that good scientific research depends on access to high-quality data. Effective data access strategies are essential for accurate and reliable risk assessment, which ultimately informs better decision-making in both research and practice. Participants discussed the importance of developing proper documentation throughout the data collection process because data collection processes ensure consistency and reliability, making it easier for researchers to perform proper analysis.

The discussion on data quality continued pointing to the need for triangulating data from multiple sources (i.e. open data, primary sources

and court records) and conducting thorough groundwork. Participants agreed that high-quality data is essential for establishing reliable risk assessment processes, analysis and informed decision-making. A debate emerged on whether more data is needed or if existing data is sufficient and that access to data by researchers is what is lacking. The discussion focused on the relevance of the data, suggesting that the quality and applicability of data might be more important than the sheer quantity.

Participants talked about how the definition of validity in risk assessment should be expanded to include positive outcomes such as academic engagement and attendance to meetings with counselors etc. This broader perspective recognizes that effective risk assessment when linked to risk management can contribute to positive developmental outcomes, not just the mitigation of negative behaviors. The choice of the type of outcomes being assessed has an impact on the measurement methods used to determine if such outcomes have been achieved and on the overall validity of any research conducted on the topic. Participants continued the discussion talking about issues of ownership and entitlement between researchers and practitioners to improve data access and collaboration.

Participants highlighted the importance of involving practitioners in research using participatory research approaches that ensure that the practical perspectives and experiences of practitioners are incorporated, making the research more relevant and applicable. Such engagement should be driven by clear guidelines and agreements to facilitate the sharing of data and ensure that both parties can contribute to and benefit from collaborative research efforts. Such agreements ensure that data can be shared securely and ethically between different stakeholders, fostering collaboration and enhancing research quality. Challenges and incentives for conducting independent evaluations in the field were discussed. Independent evaluations are crucial for objective assessment and validation of risk assessment tools and processes. The importance of

longitudinal studies was emphasized for better understanding of the impact of specific interventions on outcomes. Participants highlighted the need for national frameworks and standardized data collection methods. Such frameworks and methods would ensure consistency and reliability, facilitating better comparisons and analyses across different regions and contexts.

The final discussion centered on balancing the need for structured processes and tools with human-centered approaches in training, assessment, and implementation. In addition, participants expressed concern about the potential dehumanization when focusing too much on tools and frameworks, rather than the individual. The need for better collaboration between researchers and clinicians was discussed to ensure that objectives are clear, and the focus remains on the individuals. Additionally, concerns about the potential negative impact of frequent risk assessments, including power dynamics between assessors and those being assessed and the possibility of increasing risk, were raised. Finally, the workshop participants identified priority areas for research in risk assessment as follows:

- **Validating and improving the tools** – participants pointed to the need of more practice-based research to validate existing tools (i.e., testing reliability and develop strategies to test predictive validity), better integration of more recent research on individual level risk factors in the development of the tools, determine how to validate the risk factors that are used to develop the tools, understand how risk/protective factors are associated with different ideologies, different extremist outcomes and age/gender profiles, focus on a younger generation of extremists which may require tools with more emphasis on the identification of needs and protective factors rather than risks. Participants also pointed to the need to understand the effectiveness of using multiple tools at the same time, understanding

the measurement of cross-over risk and improve access to data and data collection efforts.

- **Measuring change/outcomes over time** – participants pointed to the need for more research to understand the validity of tools to assess change in behaviors overtime, more specifically how risk assessment tools and related processes can assess change including progress away from and relapse into extremist activities, how can tools effectively support case management processes and the monitoring of outcomes for specific interventions.
- **Appropriate use of tools** – participants pointed to the need to conduct research to understand what tools should be used based on the situation and context and how are practitioners using such tools, how to improve fidelity in the use of the tools, identify ways to better connect the measurement of risk assessment with risk management activities, adapt the use of the tools for specific sites/professions, and determine the cost in terms of human resources, time and expected outcomes and understand what tool characteristics and processes are necessary to withstand judicial scrutiny.
- **Training and use of tools** – participants emphasized the importance of trainings and the development of best practices for training professionals who are conducting risk assessment, as well as research to determine the type of training, educational background and expertise needed to use the tools.
- **Access to better quality data:** participants pointed to the need for longitudinal studies, use of participatory research approaches, use of protocols by practitioners that increase quality of data, practitioners collecting data on contextual factors that may influence the risk-assessment results, development of pre-defined written agreements between practitioners and researchers to enhance the exchange of de-identified data ensuring international ethical standards, development of national and international frameworks for the

sharing of data, enhance triangulation of data, enhance researchers' collaborations (required criteria for funding), and generate a clearinghouse of accessible data sources.



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