

# How to use risk assessments

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# What risk assessments can accomplish

- Estimate the risk of reoffending for youth, if nothing is done
- Guide intervention planning
- Provide important data for program development
- Reduce bias in assessment of youth's risk
- Reduce cost by decreasing use of more intensive services
- Improve the targeting of services/interventions
- Reduce re-offense rates

# What can risk assessments not do

- They are not prescriptive– that is, they cannot provide an exact course of action for the youth. A tool and guide for probation staff, but can't be used instead of professional judgment.
- NOT a mental health assessment.
- Determine risk for reoffending outside of the area or time-period for which it is developed.



# Key points:

- Risk and Needs instruments are central to juvenile justice evidence-based practices– but proper implementation is key.
- Risk Assessment measures risk of reoffending
- Needs Assessment measures and identifies the areas a youth need services

# Evidence-based risk assessment process:

- Uses one or more standardized, empirically validated risk assessment instrument and professional judgment
- To collect and use characteristics of the youth and youth's circumstances
- To make the best decision for intervention and management of the case to reduce risk

# Evidence-Based Practice

- “... the term “evidence-based” can be employed to describe desirable practices for three activities: (a) the risk-assessment process, (b) the risk assessment instrument used in that process, and (c) the development of risk-related policies and procedures.”

*Vincent et al. 2012. Risk Assessment in Juvenile Justice: A Guidebook for Implementation. Models for change. p. 36*

<http://www.modelsforchange.net/publications/346>



# Meaning of Risk

- Risk of reoffending or re-referral to juvenile justice department –if no intervention/service is provided.
- Risk → likelihood of new referral/offending
- Risk Assessment instruments measures the likelihood of reoffending/re-referral
  - Degree of harm/ Public Safety- delinquent offenses?
  - Violation of Probation re-referral– what's the risk....?

# Meaning of risk

- Low Risk → means the youth is unlikely to commit a new offense (even if no intervention/ service is provided)
  - High Risk → means the youth have a greater likelihood of committing a new offense.
  - Moderate Risk– not low/ not high. The reoffense rate for this group is about average.
- What does 30 % chance/ risk of rain mean...



# Common Risk Factors

Dynamic factors/  
criminogenic need  
factors:

- Substance abuse problems
- Delinquent peers
- Untreated mental health problems (e.g. attention deficit)
- Poor parental supervision

Static factors:

- Age at first offense (<13)
- History of offending
- Violent offending or serious offending
- Prior supervision failures/probation violations

# Risk-Need-Responsivity and effective programming

- THE RNR approach has shown to promote outcomes for youth and to decrease reoffending
- Focus on targeting specific factors playing a key role in the youth's reoffending
- The risk-need-responsivity approach has four guiding principles:
  - Risk principle
  - Need principle
  - Responsivity principle
  - Professional discretion principle

# Risk Principle

- Highest risk offenders should receive the most intensive monitoring and services to reduce the risk of continued offending

# Need Principle

- Target interventions for factors that are linked to reduction in reoffending
- Dynamic factors/criminogenic factors. These are the factors that can be changed such as reducing involvement with delinquent peers, or improving parental practices.

# Responsivity principle

- Interventions should address the offenders' specific characteristics that may affect how they respond to treatment.
- For example, learning style, motivation, mental health may impact how well an intervention or program will work for a child.

# Professional Discretion principle

- Having reviewed risk, need and responsivity considerations for a youth, the decision about case planning should be based on good professional judgment – not just scores.

# Reduce recidivism

- Research has shown that matching services to juveniles criminogenic needs as identified by a risk assessment tool can reduce the re-offending rate to 25 % compared to 75 % for youth who received services that did not match their needs.
- Criminogenic needs → right services more important than risk level or number of services received by the youth.

(Vieira et al 2009 cited in Vincent et al., 2012 p. 23)



# Revisiting the RANA Data Analysis from 2012

Why it Matters

# RANA Analysis

- The ultimate goal/purpose of using an assessment is to reduce recidivism and maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery by targeting supervision and services.
  - Getting the most you can out of limited resources

# RANA Analysis

- Errors in your assessment may lead to
  - Misclassification of juveniles →
  - No targeting of supervision and services →
  - Misuse of resources
  - Higher recidivism

# RANA Analysis

- Dispositions 1/1/2011 – 6/30/2012

Risk Level	N	Percent
High	5,499	11%
Medium	18,590	36%
Low	27,777	54%

# RANA Analysis

Risk Level by Disposition				
	High	Medium	Low	Total
Supervisory Caution	8%	33%	59%	100%
Deferred Prosecution	2%	25%	73%	100%
Adjudicated Probation	20%	48%	32%	100%
TJJD Commitment	48%	44%	8%	100%
Certified Adult	27%	45%	28%	100%

# RANA Analysis

- Juveniles adjudicated to probation 1/1/2011-6/30/2012

Juveniles Adjudicated to Probation by Risk Level	
High	14%
Medium	48%
Low	38%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

- Of these juveniles adjudicated to probation, **71%** started a Program within 30 days of their disposition

# RANA Analysis

Proportion of Juveniles to start a Program within  
30 Days of Disposition by Risk Level

High Risk	Medium Risk	Low Risk
74%	69%	68%

- A higher percentage of high risk juveniles enter programs than low risk juveniles

# RANA Analysis

- For departments with fewer programs available, there is a much larger difference between proportion of high risk and low risk juveniles starting a program

Started a Program w/in 30 Days of Probation Disposition		
Number of Programs Available*	Low Risk Juveniles	High Risk Juveniles
3 or fewer programs	23%	52%
4 to 10 programs	61%	63%
More than 10 programs	72%	76%

\*Source: TJJD Program & Services Registry

# RANA Analysis

- Of juveniles adjudicated to probation, **25%** entered Placement within 30 days of their disposition.

Proportion of Juveniles by Risk Level to enter Placement within 30 Days of Disposition

High Risk	Medium Risk	Low Risk
53%	28%	11%

# RANA Analysis

- Of the 521 low risk juveniles who entered Placement, 137 (26%) were low needs as well.
- Low risk/low needs juveniles who entered Placement → nearly **60%** had a Misdemeanor for their current offense

# Needs and Services: RANA Case Plan Domains

Risk/Need Factor	Case Plan Domain
Drug Use: Frequent	Substance Abuse
Parent/Guardian Supervision: Some Difficulty Controlling and No Control	Family Services
Parent Criminal History: Yes	Family Services
Runaway: Two or more	Family Services
School Discipline Referrals: Three or more	Education
Chronically Truant: Yes	Education
Juvenile Aggressive Behavior: Yes	Safety/Security
Prior Traumatic Events: Yes	Mental Health
Mental Health Needs: Yes	Mental Health
Current Offense a Violent Felony: Yes	Safety/Security
Sibling Criminal History: Yes	Family Services
Substance Use/Exposure: Yes	Substance Abuse
Currently Failing 2+ Subjects: Yes	Education

# Needs and Services Case Plan Domains

- What non-residential programs are available in your county to serve a target population of high risk and high need kids?
  - What case plan domains are most common among kids scoring high on both risk and needs?
  - What case plan domains are most common among kids that are moderate or low risk, but high need?
  - What program/service are available to address these needs?
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# How can we be more evidence-based...

- Evidence-based practice means using the information about a kid's risk and needs level as a guide for case planning and intervention
- Evidence-based practice means to use the information about the kids in your jurisdiction to target the highest risk youth and their criminogenic needs by developing programs and services that address those.
- USE risk and needs data to know what services the department need to focus on and develop.

