

Field Reliability of SVP Evaluation

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Track: Sex Offender

Level: Intermediate

Room: TBD

CE: CPA/BBS/BRN, MCLE (1.5)

Narrative

Sexually Violent Predator (SVP) evaluations have high stakes consequences for public safety and individual rights and civil liberties. They must be reliable.

Statistical reliability is the foundation of test validity and predictive ability. Similarly, diagnoses must be reliable statistically, especially for use in high-stakes decisions. Poor inter-rater reliability might be due to poor or inadequate training, or possibly to bias.

Examining the field reliability of these evaluations is the best way to test these features. This presentation explores research recently conducted at the Department of State Hospitals which demonstrates a high level of field reliability in the conduct of SVP evaluations for inmates facing potential SVP commitment after their prison terms. The presenters first review the ethical and scientific foundations of objective assessment, particularly evaluator vulnerability to bias. They review key studies demonstrating limited reliability in some field studies of risk assessment instruments. Ways to mitigate and control for bias and enhance reliability of evaluator decision-making are discussed. The specific outcomes of the research are explored in this context.

The results showed high inter-rater reliability of actuarial risk assessments for both negative and positive SVP report findings. As well, higher actuarial risk ratings were associated with a higher probability of a positive SVP outcome. The kappa reliability of pedophilic disorder was substantial for both positive and negative outcomes. This suggests that evaluators determine outcome on both diagnosis and risk, as is fitting base on established theory, empirical evidence, and statutory requirements. The research showed no significant difference between state-employed and contractor employees, suggesting little “adversarial allegiance” in this sample.

The presenters then explain the results of this research from a bias mitigation perspective. They propose that known and established ways of improving reliability are in play in the context of these evaluations. High standards of evaluator selection, standardized assessment, rigorous and consistent training, and robust quality assurance programs contribute to these high levels. Recommendations for continued quality improvement and applicability to other programs is discussed.

Bio

Joseph Lockhart, PhD, ABPP

Joseph has been involved in forensic mental health, correctional mental health, and forensic assessment for over 20 years. He is Board Certified in forensic psychology, and is a Fellow of the American Academy of forensic psychology. Joseph received his PhD from the University of Illinois in Chicago, and completed his internship at Camarillo State Hospital. He worked for the

County of Venture with a forensic alternative sentencing program, assessing and providing alternatives to incarceration for mentally ill offenders in the criminal justice system. Joseph then worked for the federal Bureau of prisons, as the Drug Abuse Treatment Program Coordinator at the Lompoc federal prison. Joseph worked as a forensic psychologist within the Santa Barbara County court system, providing consultations and risk assessments for Judges, defense attorneys, and prosecution attorneys. For the past five years, Joseph has worked as a Consulting Psychologist and SVP Evaluator with the Department of State Hospitals, where he conducts risk assessments for post-prison civil commitment (such as mentally disordered offender and sexually violent predator assessments) of inmates nearing release.

Melinda DiCiro, PsyD

Melinda is Board Certified in Forensic Psychology and is a Fellow of the American Academy of Forensic Psychology. She received her doctoral degree in clinical psychology from Spalding University in Louisville, Kentucky. She completed her pre-doctoral internship at Austin State Hospital in Texas and post-doctoral supervision in forensic assessment in Sacramento. She worked as the clinical director of inpatient and crisis assessment units and the behavioral management team in a maximum-security California prison for 10 years. Melinda is currently a Chief Psychologist for the Mentally Disordered Offender (MDO) civil commitment program for the California Department of State Hospitals. She also has a private forensic evaluation practice. Dr. DiCiro frequently presents on civil commitment-related topics at state and national conferences.

James Rokop, PhD

James is the Chief Psychologist for the California Department of State Hospitals, SVP program. James has extensive history evaluating both juvenile and adult sex offenders and was a consulting psychologist for five years performing SVP evaluations. James also maintains a private practice and has expertise in competency to stand trial, not guilty by reason of insanity, and juvenile transfer cases and has qualified as an expert in several counties for both juvenile and adult matters. James frequently presents on SVP commitment-related topics at state and national conferences.

Learning Objectives

1. List three ethical standards regarding objectivity and bias reduction in forensic evaluation
2. Cite one current scientific reference exploring the sources of bias and its mitigation
3. Name 5 main sources of evaluator bias.
4. Discuss one way to mitigate the main sources of bias described above.
5. Identify the inter-rater reliability of Static 99 results in this study.
6. Identify the inter-rater reliability of Pedophilic Disorder diagnosis in this study.
7. Describe the relationship between contractor and employee scores in this study.
8. Explain the relationship of pedophilic disorder diagnosis and risk ratings in this study.
9. List 3 ways the studied program may mitigate bias.