

## What Should Be Assessed In Sexual Offender Risk Assessments?

Ruth E. Mann, Ph.D.  
R. Karl Hanson, Ph.D.  
David Thornton, Ph.D.

Actuarial risk tools have made substantial contributions to improving the quality of risk assessment for sexual offenders. We need to know more, however, about what these tools are measuring and how the factors assessed contribute to recidivism risk. Understanding the basic elements of risk are needed for many applied problems, including interpreting conflicting results of multiple actuarial tools and evaluating reduction in risk for high risk offenders. This workshop will be based on material arising from a year-long, international project to review and develop risk assessment theory, research and practice. The workshop will equip those attending with an understanding of the scientific basis for risk assessment; a recognition of the gaps in our theory, knowledge and practice; and a map of the journey ahead of us in making risk assessment more accurate, more comprehensive, more ethical and, consequently, less controversial.

The workshop will address the following questions:

1. What are the established principles of risk assessment on which there is general agreement?
2. What are the differences between propensities and manifestations in understanding and identifying risk factors?
3. What risk factors for sexual recidivism have been established and how strong is their evidence base?
4. How should risk factors best be grouped, if at all?
5. What protective factors for sexual recidivism have been established and how strong is their evidence base?
6. How can we identify when dynamic risk factors have changed and when risk has reduced?
7. How do existing risk assessment frameworks measure up against the identified qualities of a good framework?
8. Where should we proceed from here, in terms of both theory and practice?

The workshop will offer opportunities to participate in exercises discussing protective factors for sexual offenders and exploring ways in which change in risk factors could be measured. Attendance at this workshop will be most beneficial for those who already have experience in applying dynamic risk assessment frameworks.