

What is a Psychosexual Risk Assessment?

A psychosexual risk assessment is a comprehensive clinical and forensic evaluation of an individual who has been charged with or convicted of a sex offense or sex related offense (e.g. possession of child pornography). The assessment is completed by a qualified licensed mental health professional who has received extensive clinical training and supervision in both evaluating and treating sex offenders.

The risk assessment has multiple purposes, the most important of which is to identify individuals who can be safely supervised and treated in the community from those who represent distinct risks to the community. Risk assessments provide critical information about the underlying psychosocial and psychosexual factors that contribute to an individual's offense conduct. The degree of risk that these factors individually and collectively represent will result in more careful and thoughtful decisions regarding plea negotiations and structuring sentencing dispositions.

Risk assessments outline information about supervision and treatment restrictions, necessary behavioral changes and an individual's capacity and motivation to participate in a rigorous community based sex offender treatment program. This information will aid both defense attorneys and decision makers responsible for ensuring public safety (judges, probation officers, prosecutors) consider the identified risk factors when deciding whether an individual can safely remain in the community under stringent conditions of probation supervision. Should an individual's offense conduct and previous history of offending demonstrate that they are a current threat to the community, other appropriate considerations should be given to the type of placement or required level of care. Safe supervision in the community may include sex offender treatment, mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, or some combination of these treatment interventions. The risk assessment also informs decision makers about the application of registration and community notification policies to ensure public safety. Lastly, a psychosexual risk assessment highlights the important factors contributing to an individual's sex offense, identifying the specific areas of change required to avoid future sexual offending. The importance of an accurate identification of treatment needs is critical to the reduction of sexual recidivism. Understanding an individual's treatment needs will assist supervision and treatment staff in targeting specific areas for change and the methods and timing for doing so.

A comprehensive psychosexual risk assessment requires the collection of vast amounts of psychosocial and psychosexual data and information pertaining to an individual's current life situation and past. This data can be divided into the following nine components:

1. **Offense Component** – This phase of a risk assessment requires a careful analysis of an individual's offense conduct and ability to accept responsibility for the offending conduct without blaming, rationalizing, denying, minimizing, or justifying their actions. Careful examination should be given to:
 - a. the onset of the behavior
 - b. whether the behavior has escalated over time
 - c. the frequency of the behavior
 - d. the amount of force or level of coercion used
 - e. the level of intrusiveness of sexual offense conduct
 - f. the level of planning and/or grooming involved
 - g. whether weapons were used
 - h. the important needs the individual may have been trying to meet when they offended.

Ronald I Weiner, PHD, LLC is a forensic mental health clinic, providing a full array of assessment, treatment, consultation, training & litigation support services to attorneys, courts and government/social service mental health agencies.

Executive Director's Corner

The Risk Assessor is designed to introduce and provide important information to those key decision makers involved in the adjudication and/or supervision of individuals charged with or convicted of sexual offenses. *The Risk Assessor* will serve to supplement my university teaching, and clinical and forensic work over the last thirty five years.

In our next issue, *The Risk Assessor* will focus on the various types of risk assessment instruments and tests used. I appreciate your continued interest in our clinic!

Ronald I. Weiner, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Ronald I. Weiner, PHD, LLC
*ATSA Clinical Member**

**ATSA (Association for the treatment of Sexual Abusers)*



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2. Sexual History Component - The focus of this phase is the collection of extensive information, garnered from the individual, regarding their sexual history. Included are developmental, adolescent, and adult experiences, as well as, sexual attitudes, thoughts, values, and behaviors that support or condone sexual offending. Such information is acquired through psychosexual testing, sexual history questionnaires, comprehensive and structured sexual history clinical interviews, and sexual history polygraphs. This necessary data highlights the prominent risk factors and targets of treatment intervention.

3. Deviant Sexual Arousal Component - During this phase, the degree and diversity of deviant sexual interests and preferences, which may require modification, are objectively assessed. The primary method for doing so is through the administration of a Phallometric assessment performed in a lab setting. The purpose of this test is to measure penile responses to deviant sexual stimuli to determine if the individual becomes aroused. The stimuli sets used to trace penile responsiveness (tumescence) are non-pornographic and are standardized to ensure the accuracy of the collected data. It is important that the individual has knowledge regarding the areas of deviant sexual interest or preference they may have, thus enabling them to make a commitment to change during the course of treatment. Deviant sexual arousal has been consistently identified as one of the critical sexual recidivism risk factors.

4. Criminal and Rule-Breaking Attitudes, Values, and Behaviors Component - This phase requires an evaluation of current, developmental and adolescent data regarding attitudes or thoughts that support or condone general criminal-rule breaking behavior and the degree to which the individual engages in such behavior.

5. Substance Use Component - The focus of this phase requires a careful evaluation of any current or past history of substance use, abuse, and/or dependence. Additionally, it is important to assess the degree to which alcohol or other drugs interfere with the individual's life, obligations and responsibilities.

6. Emotional Management and Mental Health Stability Component - The degree to which an individual has major mental health problems that persistently impair their psychological, social, educational and/or occupational functioning are examined during this phase. The manner in which an individual manages emotional states associated with their past sexual offending is also important to address.

7. Social Influences Component - At this stage, attention is shifted towards evaluating the types of positive and negative social influences in an individual's life including family, friends, and co-workers. Is the individual in a stable relationship that is healthy and positive (if in a relationship)? Is the individual financially responsible and maintaining stable employment? Does the individual have a consistent and satisfying living situation?

8. Amenability, Motivation to Change, Problem Solving Component

- During this phase, a careful appraisal is taken of the degree to which an individual recognizes that they have a sexual deviance problem requiring intervention. Does the individual accept their need for sex offender specific treatment and are they prepared to put the time and effort into making required necessary changes? Determining an individual's prominent personality and problem solving style is critical for assessing compliance with the rigorous demands and requirements of sex offender treatment and supervision. Is the individual able to identify and explain problems, generate possible solutions, weigh the pros and cons of possible solutions, and carry out a plan of action regarding existing problems? Is the individual able to recognize, ask for, and accept assistance when appropriate?

9. Treatment Needs and Treatment Plan Component - This final stage integrates the previous components of the risk assessment process and culminates in a report detailing specific treatment needs and a comprehensive treatment plan. A treatment needs assessment will identify the important targets of change while the treatment plan will include a specific time table and the modules of treatment an individual is expected to successfully complete before being discharged.

The preparation of a competent and comprehensive psychosexual risk assessment is a rigorous and time-consuming process. An individual's sexual deviance problems are examined in an earnest and realistic manner. Avoiding re-offense requires an individual's lifetime commitment to change, enabling them to modify their deviant sexual behavior.

Our Clinic offers services in the following areas:

Sex Offender Assessment & Treatment

- Psychosexual risk assessment & treatment planning
- Treatment Programs for Adults & Juveniles
- Polygraph Services & Phallometric Assessments

Forensic Evaluations

- Assessment of competency to stand trial
- Assessment of mental state at time of offense
- Assessment of long term risk for violence
- Sentencing evaluations & treatment plans

Anger Management Programs Shoplifting Control Programs

Treatment for Sexually Compulsive Disorders

Civil & Tort Law Services



**OUR NEXT TRAINING SESSION: TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2009 9:00-11:00 AM
TOPIC: PSYCHO-SEXUAL RISK ASSESSMENTS (AN IN-DEPTH LOOK)
RSVP TO: JENNA D'ANGELO (JDANGELO@CFAPC.ORG OR 301-949-4907)**