

Sexual offender risk assessment strategies: is there a convergence of opinion yet?

Douglas P. Boer, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology, University of Waikato

[Sexual Offender Treatment, Volume 1 (2006), Issue 2]

Abstract

While there is no convergence of opinion in the academic literature, many clinicians have already adopted a convergent approach to risk assessment, whether through deliberate adoption of complementary instruments or through informal clinical modification of risk assessment instrument findings. The present paper suggests that a convergent approach to risk assessment may be both the most responsible and most appropriate approach at this time, given the lack of research to substantiate a strong superiority of one type of instrument (actuarial risk tests versus structured clinical guidelines) over the other as well as the complementary nature of these types of tests in terms of how risk is conceptualized and analyzed. The research in a convergent approach is meager and this issue deserves some attention to ensure that all clinicians doing risk assessments of sexual offenders are providing the most information possible to decision makers to protect the rights, safety, and security of our clients (the correctional and justice systems, the public, and the offenders).

Key words: Risk assessment, sexual offenders, actuarial risk assessment, clinical risk assessment

Author address

Douglas P. Boer, Ph.D.
Associate Professor and Director of Clinical Psychology
Department of Psychology
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand
E-mail: drdoug@waikato.ac.nz