

Risk versus Behavioral Threat Assessment Process

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2. **Some of the material viewed for this presentation can be upsetting and sensitive.**

Outline

1. Discuss risk v. threat assessment process.
2. Review of threat assessment process.
3. Identify relevant risk assessments instruments

Threat Assessment Process Approach

1. Affective versus Predatory Violence
2. Threat versus Risk Assessment
3. Pathway to Intended Violence
4. Identifying Warning Behaviors
5. Management
6. Bias - Limitations

1. Affective v. Predatory Violence

Affective “Emotional” Violence

- Intense ANS arousal
- Reactive - immediate violence
- Perception of threat
- Goal is threat reduction
- Time-limited behavior
- Limbic system driven
- Preceded by public posturing
- Heightened and altered awareness

Predatory “Planned” Violence

- Minimal or no ANS
- No conscious emotion
- Planned, purposeful, intentional
- No or minimal threat
- Many goals
- No displaced target
- No time limit to behavior
- Preceded by private ritual
- Primarily cognitive
- Focused awareness

2. Threat vs. Risk

Threat Assessment, Goodrum et al., 2018

“The threat assessment process seeks to evaluate the likelihood a person will perpetrate **“targeted violence”** (i.e., toward a specific person or group), such as an assassination or a school shooting. In schools, threat assessment procedures seek to evaluate a student’s risk of **targeted violence and build a safety plan to support the student.”** (pp. 123).

Threat Assessment

- Gather information to understand the threat of **targeted** violence posed by a person and process of developing and executing plans to mitigate threats of **targeted** violence posed by a person
- idiographic approach
- “collecting the dots”

Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management

**PROACTIVE
PREVENTIVE**

Risk Assessment, Goodrum et al., 2018

“A risk assessment evaluates the risk and protective factors present in a person and evaluates the risk for **general and specific forms of violence...**” (pp. 123).

Nomothetic approach

Threat Assessments
ARE NOT
Psychiatric or Psychological or
Mental Health Evaluations

Emotional Reframing

- “She is frustrated, blowing off steam, it’s just a conflict.”
- Viewing pathway-relevant behavior as emotional expression.
- Warning behavior visible, it was misread.

Developmental Reframing

- “He is upset over a break-up. She is hurting. She will bounce back.”
- Adolescents sharing that they “can’t handle” their feelings may benefit from mental health interventions or special guidance.
- Behavior was not ignored, it was misclassified.

Clinical Reframing

- “They are depressed and anxious. They will be okay.”
- Conclude behavior reflects internalizing symptoms rather than pathway-relevant ideation.
- The behavior was misread.

Character Reframing

■ “He’s a good kid.”

Risk v. Threat Decision Tree



Juvenile Risk

```
graph TD; A[Juvenile Risk] --> B[Structured Assessment for Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY)]; A --> C[Early Assessment Risk List v3 (EARL v3)]; A --> D[Juvenile Sexual Offender Assessment Protocol - II (J-SOAP-II)];
```

**Structured Assessment
for Violence Risk in
Youth (SAVRY)**

**Early Assessment Risk
List v3
(EARL v3)**

**Juvenile Sexual
Offender Assessment
Protocol - II
(J-SOAP-II)**

Adults

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graph TD; A[Adults] --> B[Historical Clinical Risk 20 v3 (HCR – 20 v3)]; A --> C[Sexual Violence Risk 20 v2 (SVR 20 v2)]; A --> D[Level of Service Inventory – Revised (LSI-R)];
```

**Historical
Clinical Risk 20
v3 (HCR – 20
v3)**

**Sexual Violence
Risk 20 v2 (SVR
20 v2)**

**Level of Service
Inventory –
Revised (LSI-R)**

Adult-Specific

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graph TD; A[Adult-Specific] --> B[Stalking Assessment Management v2 (SAM - v2)]; A --> C[Stalking Risk Profile (SRP)]; A --> D[Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA - v3)]; A --> E[Workplace Assessment of Violence Risk v3 (WAVR - 21 v3)]; A --> F[Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol (TRAP - 18)];
```

**Stalking
Assessment
Management
v2 (SAM – v2)**

**Stalking Risk
Profile (SRP)**

**Spousal
Assault Risk
Assessment
(SARA – v3)**

**Workplace
Assessment of
Violence Risk
v3 (WAVR – 21
v3)**

**Terrorist
Radicalization
Assessment
Protocol
(TRAP – 18)**

3. Pathway to Targeted or Intended Violence

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Elements of Grievance

- Loss
- Humiliation
- Anger
- Blame

4. Warning Behaviors

Targeted Violence - Proximal

Proximal Warning Behaviors

(Meloy, et al., 2012)

1. Pathway
2. Fixation
3. Identification
4. Novel aggression
5. Energy burst
6. Leakage
7. Directly communicated threat
8. Last resort behavior

Warning Behaviors

- *Accelerants*—focus on accelerating change
- Patterns of behavior, not individual risk factors

Pathway

**Research, planning, preparation, or implementation
of an attack**

Fixation (EOB)

Any behavior that indicates an increasingly pathological preoccupation with a person or a cause:

- increasing perseveration on the person or cause
- increasingly strident opinion
- increasingly negative characterization of the object of fixation
- impact on the family of the object of fixation, if present and aware
- angry emotional undertone
- typically causes deterioration of social and academic functioning

Identification

- behavior that indicates a psychological desire to be a pseudo-commando
- possess warrior mentality
- closely associate with weapons or other military or law enforcement paraphernalia
- identify with previous attackers or assassins, or to identify oneself as an agent to advance a particular cause or belief system.

Novel aggression

- act of violence which appears unrelated to any targeted violence pathway warning behavior which is committed for the first time.
- violent/aggressive act, may be a measure of *response tendency*, the motivation to act on the environment, *behavioral tryout*

Energy Burst

- increase in the frequency or variety of any noted activities related to the target, even if the activities themselves are relatively innocuous, usually in the hours, days, or weeks before the attack
- social media activity may decrease during this period of time (Meloy, 2017)

Leakage

- communication to a third party of an intent to do harm to a target through an attack
 - terrestrial, or
 - online

Last resort

- Evidence of a violent “time/action imperative” (Mohandie & Duffy, 1999)
- increasing desperation, distress through declaration in word or action, forcing the individual into a last resort
- no alternative left other than violence, consequences are justified
- examples included giving away earthly possessions and/or farewell messaging—stimulated by both violent action, tying off loose ends (Meloy et al., 2023).

Directly communicated threat

- communication of a direct threat via any means to the target or law enforcement beforehand
- threat is a written or oral communication that implicitly or explicitly states a wish or intent to damage, injure, or kill the target, or individuals symbolically or associated with the target.

Distal Factors

- Personal loss
- Presence of mental health issues
- Parental mismanagement
- Academic setbacks
- Affiliation deficits
- Screen time
- Thinking/emotional/coping deficits
- Predatory or emerging violence

5. Developing Dynamic Threat Management Plan

OMG... does not work...

“Ostrich Management Gameplan”

Assessment

Identify risk and threat factors
How they manifest in person
How each is relevant

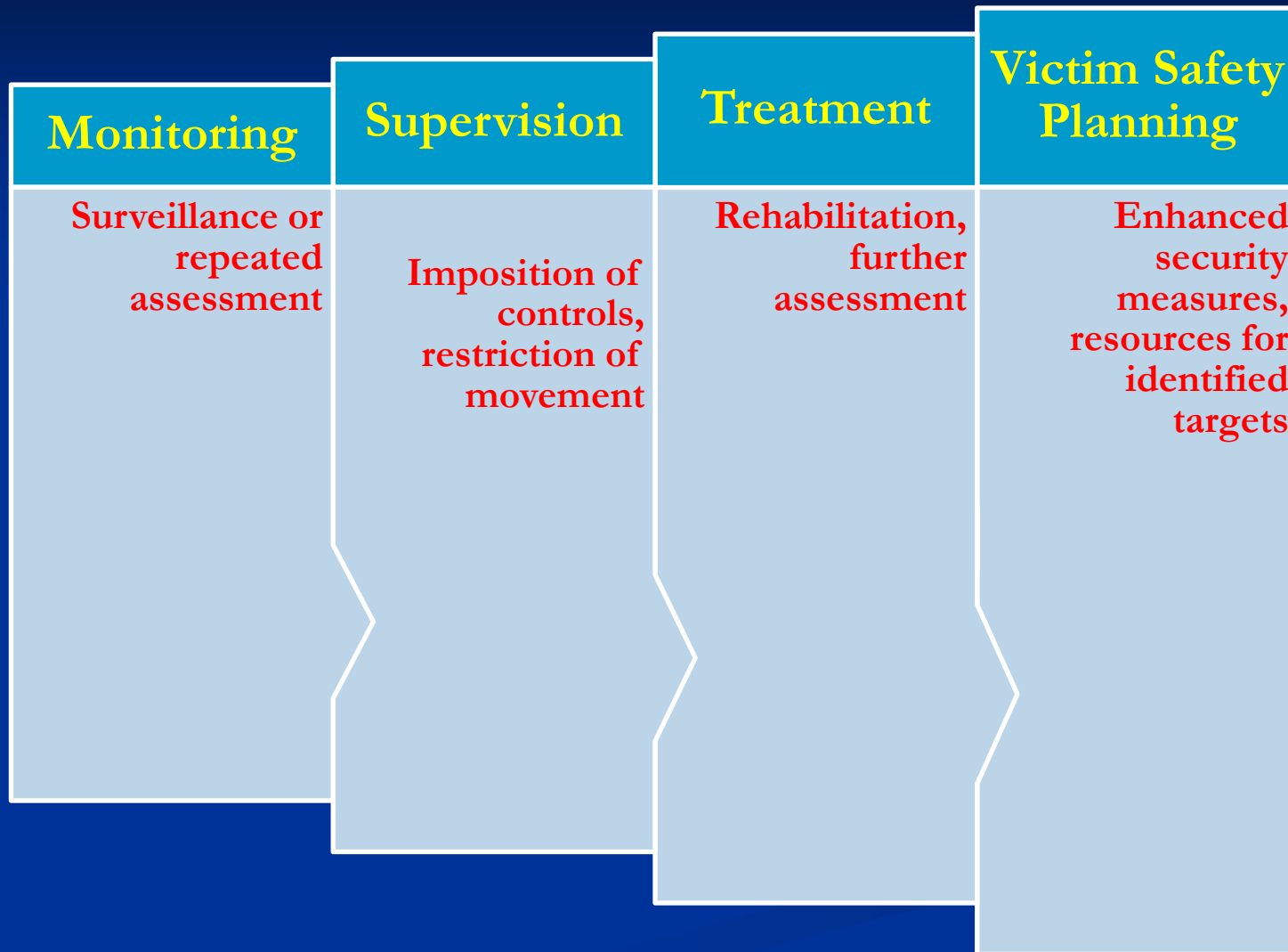
Communication

Low, moderate, high
Intensity of Management
Tailored interventions based
on risk and threat factors

Management & Treatment

Application of risk and threat
management strategies
Reassessment on regular
intervals

Strategy Planning



6. Limitations with BTAM Units/Teams

Bias - 101

- Term “bias” has its roots in the French *biais*
- *Greek, epikarsios*, which refers to “oblique”
- Currently refers to deviations from the norm

Bias - 101

- The Heuristics & Biases (HB) focused on limitations of and systematic errors in human cognition (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974; Kahneman, 2011; Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982)

Bias - 101

- **Naturalistic Decision Making (NDM)** developed as reaction to HB's narrow focus on problems in cognition
- **NDM** focused on the strengths and evolutionary adaptiveness of human cognitive capacities (see, e.g., Gigerenzer & Goldstein, 1996; Lipshitz, Klein, Orasanu, & Salas, 2001)
- **Brains** have adapted to process information in a fast and frugal way

Disagreement & Bias (Guarnera et al., 2017)

1. Inherent task difficulty
2. Limited training and certification
3. Unstandardized methods
4. Individual evaluator differences
5. Adversarial allegiance

Confirmatory Bias—how we seek to protect our beliefs

- We *notice* facts to support our beliefs
- We *overlook* facts that don't
- We *seek* information to support our beliefs
- We give *greater weight* to such information
- We *accept at face value* such information
- We are better able to *remember* such information

Anchoring Bias

- Our propensity to rely too heavily on initial information or salient numbers present in a decision context when making judgments (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974)
- Overlaps with the priming effect

Halo Effect

- Propensity for the impression of a person to influence what we think of them overall
- "physical attractiveness stereotype"
- "what is beautiful is 'good' principle"
- Impact of physical attractiveness/appearance

Bias Blind Spot

- The bias blind spot a meta-cognitive bias, describes peoples' tendency to recognize the impact of cognitive biases on others more than themselves. (Pronin et al., 2002)

Allegiance Effect

- Unconsciously draw conclusions that support the view of their referral source – when/if criminal or civil matters are pending

Myside Bias

- Tendency of people to evaluate evidence, generate evidence, and test hypotheses in a manner biased toward their **own prior beliefs, opinions, and attitudes**
- Similar to allegiance effect, but linked to one's **own personal beliefs/attitudes** rather than referral source

Base Rate Bias/Fallacy

- Propensity to ignore the base rate or what is considered general prevalence in favor of the individuating information or information pertaining only to a specific case

Category Fallacy (Kleinman, 1987)

- Mistaken assumption that a diagnostic category developed in one culture is meaningful in another.

Culture – Language

- Assessments conducted in an individual's mother tongue reveal greater psychopathology than those conducted in a later acquired language (Brown & Weisman de Mamani, 2017; Katsavdakis et al., 2005).

Thank you!