

# Principles of good risk and need assessment in a criminal justice setting, and managing people with raised risk of sexual offending who are subject to supervision

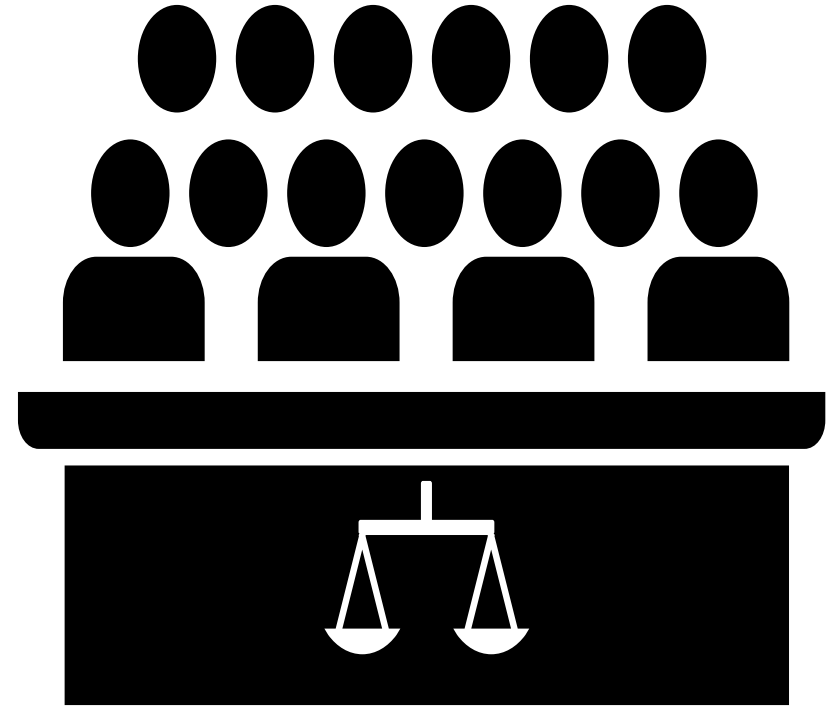
Dr Helen Wakeling

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service

# What I will cover...

- The importance of risk assessment
- What does a good risk assessment look like?
- Risk factors for sexual reconviction
- What do we know about those who are reconvicted for sexual offences?
- What might be helpful to look out for?
- Resettlement and reintegration after prison
- What good looks like when managing people sentenced for sexual offences

# 1. Risk and Need Assessment

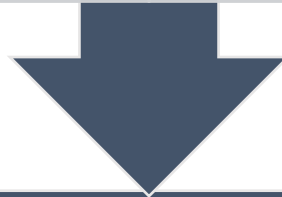


# The importance of risk assessment

Central role in every part of the Criminal Justice System:

Likelihood of reoffending

Risk of serious harm



But several factors influence the quality and accuracy of our assessments....

# Types of Risk Assessment Tool

## Actuarial Scales

- Combine risk factors into a total score or risk category linked to an estimate of probability of an outcome.

## Professional Judgment Tools

- Assessor considers or assigns scores relating to a defined set of factors but the final assessment of risk is a clinical judgement.

## Mechanical Scales

- Combine items into a total score based on a set of rules, but can include items which do not have a theoretical link to the outcome or they be by SPJ tools used in a mechanical way

# Selecting the Assessment



How reliable and accurate it is for the task in hand

- Reliability and validity of the tool with population of interest

Who is being assessed:

- Select tools that have been developed or otherwise tested with people who are similar in important ways to the person being assessed

What outcome is being assessed:

- Use tools which look at the specific type of criminal behaviour you're interested in

What they're being used for:

- Risk of reconviction vs. where to intervene to reduce risk

Consideration of the strengths and weaknesses/limitations of the tools applied or gaps in current research literature

- Have they been tested on the population of interest?

# The Approach



## **Strengths-based assessments:**

Practitioners and those being assessed value a focus on strengths, values and needs

Some preliminary evidence that incorporating strengths into assessment can enhance their accuracy.



## **Collaboration:**

Those being assessed will be more engaged and open the more they are involved and the more they understand the process.

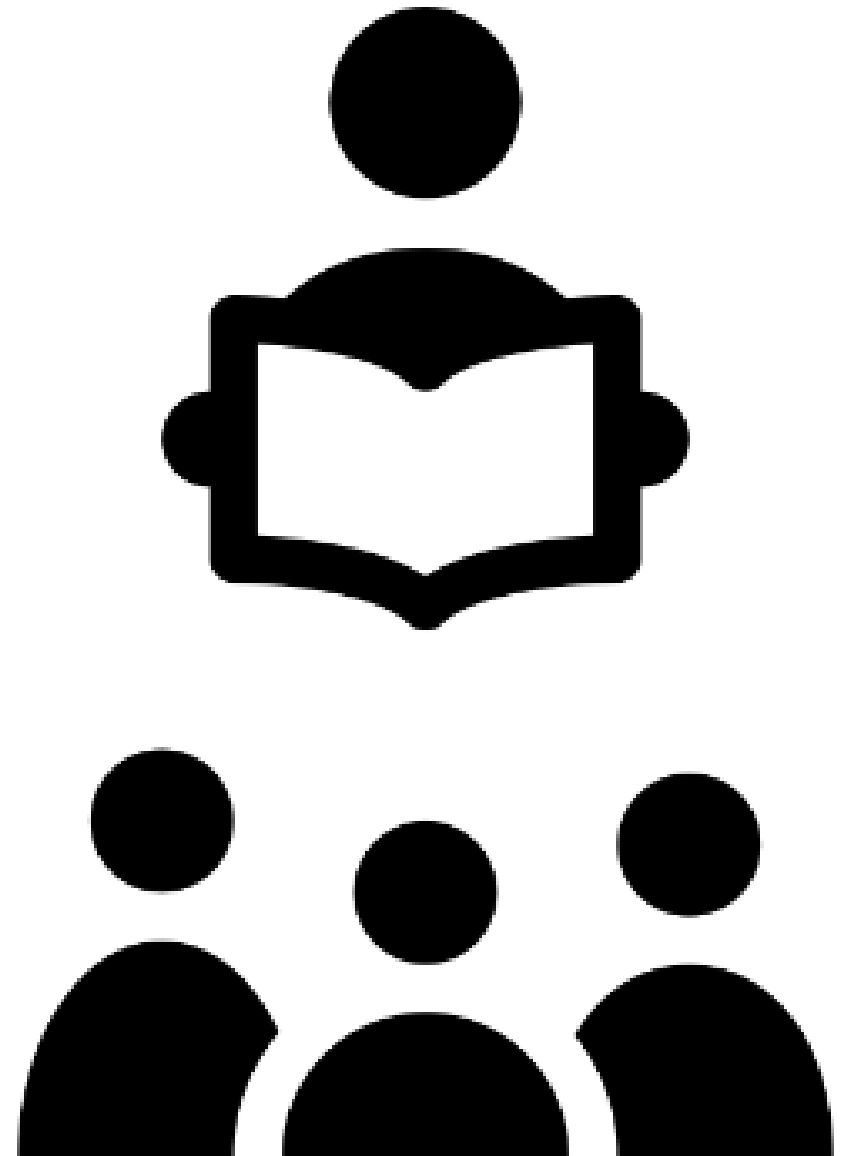


## **Procedurally just risk and need assessments:**

Ensuring those being assessed feel treated fairly in the process is likely to result in greater compliance and openness, less mistrust and hostility, and improved outcomes.

# Training and Resources

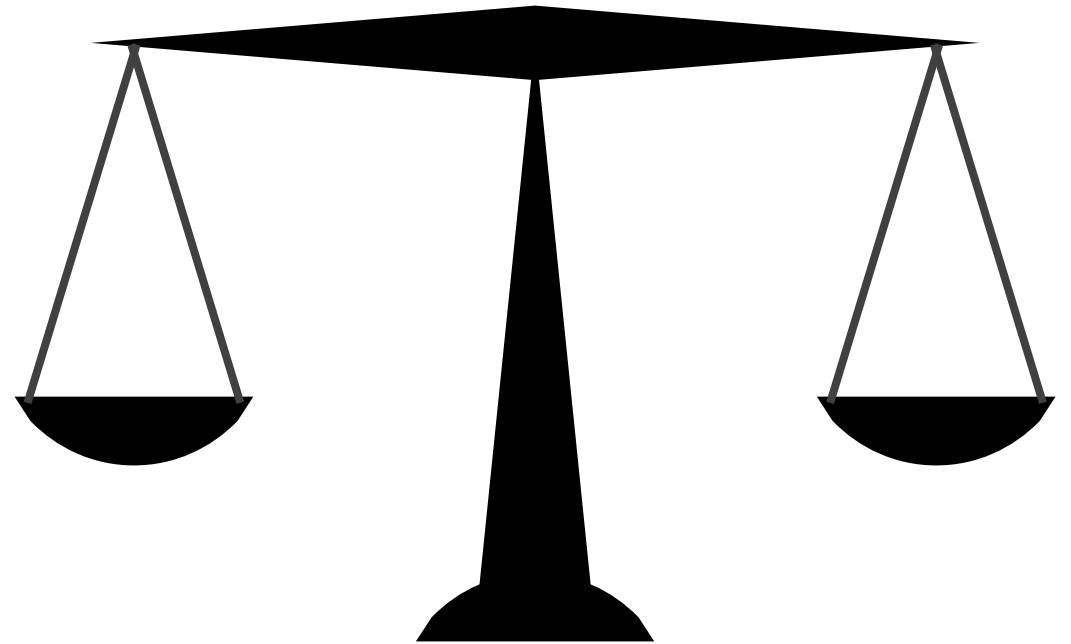
- Risk assessors need the right support and training
- Feelings about risk and need assessment
- Defensive assessment
- Resources and workload





# Reducing the influence of bias

- Including a proper consideration of the situational and social factors related to offending, and take into account progress and strengths.
  - Differential diagnosis approach
  - Being transparent about how risk is calculated
- Identifying whether data used in the predictor are biased against any community or group
- Testing the efficacy of any tool with different groups
  - Being culture fair



# Communicating assessment outcomes

- Results need to be easily understood
  - Numerical vs categorical approach
    - Understanding framing effects
- Consider linking categories with numerical information
- Consider using graphs to communicate risk
- Include contextual factors (e.g. base rates, severity of offence, and assessment tool information)



2. Factors associated  
with those who  
reoffend sexually  
when subject to  
supervision

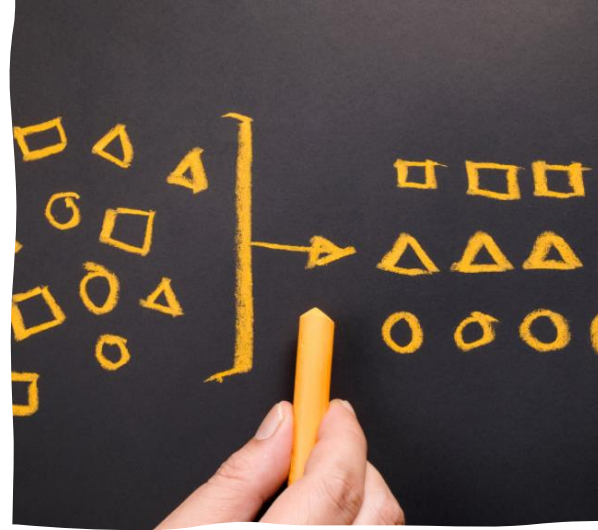




# Sexual reoffending – risk factors

- **Static:**
  - age,
  - criminal history
  - psychopathy
  - high levels of childhood adversity
- **Dynamic:**
  - Anti-social orientation
  - Personality disorder
  - Adult relationships
  - Offence related sexual interest
  - Sexual offender register
  - Opportunity





What do we know about people who have been reconvicted for sexual offences?

- Differences in reconviction rates between sexual offence types
- Time
- Specialisation within sexual offending
- Escalation



# What to look out for

- Stress or change
- Behaviour in custody



# Resettlement into the community

- Employment
- Accommodation
- Family support (young people)
- Identity
- Voice of people recalled for further sexual offences



# What does good look like?

- **Strength based** approach
- Planning for a **positive life** as well as good planning for **risk management**
- Focusing on **reintegration** factors
- Getting people into suitable **employment** and helping them to maintain it
- Getting people onto the **right treatment, and interventions** which target their risk & need factors
- Attending to **needs** around **substance misuse, mental health needs and personality disorder**
- Using risk and needs assessments validated for the people being assessed and reassessing later
- Observing behaviour in **different settings**
- Good **multi agency communication**
- **Listening** to the person being supervised
- **Ensuring probation practitioners have the right support** (both formal and informal) and tools to be able to do the job



# Hazel Kemshall's 2021 paper\*

**Protective integration** - identifying practical ways practitioners can balance desistance approaches with public safety in probation practice

Supervisors using **supportive authority**

Understanding how people frame **risk choices**

**Building strengths** and mitigating the 'pains of desistance'

Supporting **bonding capital** (securing and reinforcing belonging), and **bridging capital** (access to new support networks/opportunities)

**Enhancing resilience** and combating fatalism

# How can this be done safely?

\* Kemshall, H. (2021) Risk and Desistance: A Blended Approach to Risk Management. HM Inspectorate of Probation Academic Insights 2021/07. <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/06/Academic-Insights-Kemshall.pdf>

# What do we not yet know?

- Protected characteristics such as gender, race and ethnicity, disability and sexuality
- Case management transfers
- The voice of the people who commit the further sexual offences and/ or the victims
- Learning from what went right



Questions?

[helen.wakeling@justice.gov.uk](mailto:helen.wakeling@justice.gov.uk)