



## Psychiatry & Behavioral Science Section – 2010

### 17 The Use of Actuarial Risk Assessments Instruments in Sex Offenders: Research and Practice

*Amy Phenix, PhD\*, PO Box 325, Cambria, CA 93428; Doug Epperson, PhD\*, PO Box 642630, Pullman, WA 99164-2630; Mohan Nair, MD\*, 133 North Promenade, Suite 108, Long Beach, CA 90802; and Fabian M. Saleh, MD\*, Law and Psychiatry Service, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA*

By attending this presentation, attendees will gain an understanding of the principles of instruments used in sex offender risk assessment and the criticisms/limitations thereof. Future directions, alternatives, and evolving science will be reviewed.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by attempting to provide a balanced review of actuarial instruments and how they may have relevance to mental health professionals, law enforcement personnel, and members of the legal community who work with sex offenders.

Most first-world countries have instituted programs aimed at the identification and preventive detention of individuals perceived to be at high risk for violent sexual recidivism. Research in this area has shown that predictions based on actuarial instruments are consistently superior to predictions based on clinical interviews. A number of actuarial tools have been developed over the last decade for the purpose of predicting sexual and non-sexual violence. While there are limitations on these

instruments, predictive accuracy has improved with their continued use. In the field of sex offender risk assessment, research continues to develop instruments that are more comprehensive and can be used in more different types of populations. The Static 99 is "one of the best single predictors that our science has to offer in the area of sex offender risk assessment (Vincent, 2008)."

Amy Phenix, PhD has served as Consulting Psychologist for the California Department of Mental Health Sexual Offender Commitment Program from its inception in 1996 to 2008. She has been responsible for state-wide training of all clinical staff who perform Sexually Violent Predator (SVP) Evaluations in California (the training program is largest program of its kind in the U.S.). An overview of the actuarial tools currently in use will be presented, including the Static 99, the Static 2002, the SORAG, and the Minnesota Sex Offender Screening Tool – Revised (MnSOST). Attendees will be educated about sex offender risk assessment, report writing, and court testimony issues. The rapidly evolving research related to changing norms of the Static-99 and the MnSOST will be discussed. Strategies on interpreting and effectively communicating the implications of actuarial risk scores will also be presented. Recommendations will be made related to using these instruments in pre-treatment, parole, and civil commitment settings. Doug Epperson, PhD is the lead author of the MnSOST-R and the Juvenile Sexual Offense Recidivism Risk Assessment Tool – II (JSORRAT-II) and will discuss these instruments.

Drs. Saleh and Maram will educate the audience on current practice and new research related to risk assessment instruments for adolescent sexual offenders. The elements of a comprehensive forensic assessment, data gathering strategies, and the use of risk assessment instruments such as the PCL: Youth Version, ERASOR, and the J-SOAP-II will be covered.

**Actuarial Instruments, Static 99, MnSOST**