



Assessing and Managing Risk

- the work of the Criminal Justice Social Work Service

How we help protect individuals and the community...

The CJSWS has as a key aim the promotion of community safety in order to help make West Lothian an even better place to live. We work to increase public safety by reducing offending behaviour.

To do this, we need to know how best to target our services and our resources. We are working with many of the people who cause most concern and anxiety in their communities, but also with people who may have made only occasional rash decisions about their behaviour. No two of the people we work with will have precisely identical needs, but we need to work out how best to help each of them in the most effective and efficient way.

The key to successful intervention is good assessment; this is not a one-off activity, but a continuing process throughout our involvement with an offender. We have to consider the risk that an individual may pose – both a risk of re-offending, and a risk of behaving in a way that is harmful to other individuals, to the community or to him- or herself.

Part of this assessment uses the skills that all Social Workers learn in training, and which we ensure that all staff acquire through our programme of staff training and development. Professional judgement is certainly crucial, but we have found over the past fifteen years that there are great benefits in also using Risk Assessment tools. These are based on research into the life-style and personal factors that are known to feature among people who commit offences, and they come in a variety of formats. Some consider the wider risk of re-offending (such as the *Level of Service Inventory – Revised (LSI-R)* which we use for almost all initial assessments) and others are specifically targeted at more concerning areas of offending behaviour, such as sexual offending and domestic abuse.

While a number of Risk Assessment tools are actuarial (based on statistical probability), others are technically described as ‘an aid to structured clinical judgement’. This means that, while still based on research to identify key factors in someone’s situation and behaviour, these Risk Assessment tools take the worker through a range of areas of possible concern, helping the worker to form a clear view of the risk that the offender may pose, rather than

providing a statement of statistical probability. Specialist assessment tools to consider the risk of harmful behaviour can be much more complicated to apply, and the tools used to assess the most concerning individuals may take several hours to complete. We therefore have to only use these in situations which cause particular concern to the organisations monitoring the offender.

Risk Management of the most concerning individuals is increasingly carried out on a multi-agency basis, most often in close liaison with the Police, whose Offender Management Unit is located next to the Criminal Justice Social Work Service in West Lothian Civic Centre.

Since 2007, we have carried out part of our Risk Management responsibilities in the context of MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements). These only apply to sex offenders and certain categories of mentally-disordered offenders. We work with Police, other West Lothian Council staff, Health organisations and the Scottish Prison Service to ensure that all necessary actions are taken to protect the public and vulnerable individuals while assuring that the offender is safely reintegrated into the community.

Some Risk Assessment tools have a significant rôle in Risk Management, when we work with other organisations to ensure that the consequences of an offender's behaviour are as positive and non-harmful as possible. Certain of our Risk Assessment tools are designed to help in this process; for example, the *Acute 2007* tool should be used every time we meet with high-risk sex offenders.

Many of our Risk Assessment tools are also used by other organisations, such as Lothian and Borders Police, and much of our training is conducted jointly with these organisations, ensuring that all involved have a clear and identical understanding of how the tools work, and of their strengths and limitations in Risk Management. All of our Risk Assessment tools are assessed by Scotland's [Risk Management Authority](#).

Risk Assessment is a crucial part of the complex process of controlling risk from offenders in our communities; we consider that, although it is something that we do well as an organisation, it is important that we continue to learn skills and help develop more advanced Risk Assessment tools.

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