

Title: A Concurrent Evaluation of Threat Assessment Tools for the Individual Assessment of Terrorism

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Research Question:

What is the content overlap among three tools that may be relevant for assessing an individual's risk for terrorist violence: Version 3 of the Historical-Clinical-Risk Management—20 (HCR-20 V3), the first and second versions of the Violent Extremism Risk Assessment Protocol (VERA and VERA 2), and the Multi-Level Guidelines (MLG)?

Importance:

Professionals tasked with assessment of (potential) terrorist offenders need better information regarding the nature and content of the HCR-20 V3, VERA/VERA 2, and MLG, as well as how these tools could be used in a complementary manner for terrorism risk assessment.

Research Findings:

We evaluated the content overlap of the tools by using them to assess a series of 5 well-known cases of terrorism, and by having researchers make similarity ratings of their risk factors. The findings indicated that: (1) The HCR-20 V3 provides a comprehensive framework for evaluation of individual-level risk factors for violence (i.e., those reflecting a person's social and psychological adjustment, both past and recent); (2) the VERA/VERA 2 provide a detailed analysis of "extremist" desires, beliefs, and attitudes (i.e., those that support or condone terrorism); and (3) the MLG provides a basic assessment of individual-level risk factors and extremist desires, belief, and attitudes, but also uniquely assesses higher-level risk factors (i.e., those reflecting group characteristics, dynamics, and social context) not captured by the HCR-20 V3 or VERA/VERA 2.

Implications:

Comprehensive terrorism risk assessments routinely incorporate multiple tools. Professionals should use tools such as the HCR-20 V3 to assess individual-level risk factors for terrorist violence (and to assess risk for non-terrorist violence, where relevant). They should use tools such as the VERA 2 to assess risk factors related to extremist desires, beliefs, and attitudes. Finally, they use tools such as the MLG to assess higher-level risk factors related to group characteristics, dynamics, and social context. The use of multiple tools does not increase the time necessary to conduct a risk assessment and—although the process of reconciling the findings of different assessment tools can be difficult—has the potential to generate important insights into and deeper understanding of cases.