

# Violence risk assessment in educational settings: Reviewing evidence and practice

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## **Our Agenda**

- I. Introductions
- II. Violence Risk Assessment Approaches
- III. Risk and Protective Factors
- IV. Assessing Risk
- V. School Safety Planning

## **Current Trends in Our Schools**

- Decreasing trend in violence since early 1990s
  - Base rate for violence in schools demonstrating a consistent decline since 1993
    - *(DeVoe et al., 2003)*
  - 50% drop in violent deaths since 1992
    - *(Stephens, 2005)*
- National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) in 2008
  - *(Roberts, Zhang, Truman, & Snyder, 2010)*
  - Students ages 12 through 18
    - Victims of about 110,000 violent crimes at school
      - Rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault

## **Current Trends in Our Schools (continued)**

- Prevalence of violence in schools
  - Increases to 630,000 incidences with simple assault
    - *(Roberts, Zhang, Truman, & Snyder, 2010)*
- School bullying has increased
  - *(Derzon, 2006)*
- In 2003, 7% of student reported being bullied in previous 6 mos.
  - *(U.S. Department of Education, 2004)*
- Negative impact on school climate and contributing risk to school shootings
  - *(e.g., Cornell, Sheras, Cole, 2006)*

## A Historical Overview

- Traditional Clinical Assessments
  - Accuracy of Violence Prediction
    - (*Monahan, 1981; 1988*)
  - Violence Conceptualized
    - (*Borum, 2000*)
- Empirical contributions
  - Actuarial based models
  - Understanding of violence risk factors
  - Violence conceptualized
    - (*Borum, 2000; Monahan 1996*)
- Structured Professional Judgment
  - Integration of available information
  - Violence conceptualized
    - (*Borum, 2000; Borum, Bartell, & Forth, 2003*)

## Clinical model

- Method tended to be unstructured
  - Implications: predictive accuracy was noted to be poor
    - No more than 1 in 3 predictions (*Monahan, 1981*)
      - Favoring Type I Errors (False Positives)
  - Conceptualization of Violence
- Based largely upon the notion that an individual's dangerousness was based upon a dispositional characteristic that was static and dichotomous (*Borum, 2000*)

## Empirically Based Model

- Focus on the development of actuarial formulas for deriving factors for predicting violence in populations:
  - Improved understanding of factors
  - Better understanding of Base Rates in populations
  - Increased reliability and validity
  - Questionable generalizability (*Borum & Douglas, 2003*)
  - Conceptualization of Violence
  - Behavior understood as combination of common factors within populations

## Structured Professional Judgment Model

- Represents an evolution of previous models
  - Draws on professional literature
  - Empirically derived risk factors
  - Some evidence to suggest that these models perform as well or better
    - (*Borum & Douglas, 2003*)
- Conceptualization of Violence
  - Best understood as a contextual, dynamic, and continuous construct
  - Goal: to determine the level of risk an individual may pose for particular types of behaviors within various contexts and given specific conditions
    - (*Borum, Bartell, & Forth, 2003*)

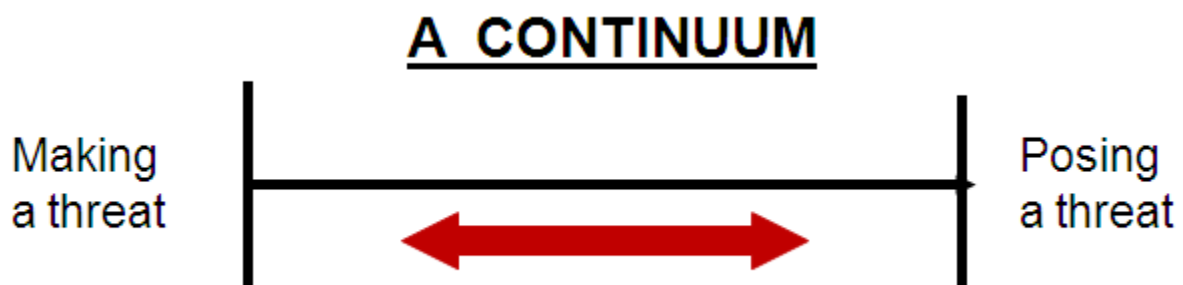
### Contemporary Understandings (Borum, 2000)

- Violence Risk is no longer conceptualized as a dispositional construct that is either present or absent (*STATIC*)
  - *Rather*
- It is a *DYNAMIC* construct that varies based on
  - CONTEXT – situations and circumstances
  - TIME – subject to change over developmental course
  - CONTINUOUS – varying along a continuum of probability

### Understanding Risk

*“There is difference between students who Make a threat and those who Pose a threat.”*

R. Borum, 2002



### Defining Violence

#### Targeted

- Perpetrator
- Targeted group
- Identification prior to incident

#### Generalized

- Many different forms
- Acting out behavior
- More Common
- Normative in some groups

### Developmental Pathways (Moffitt & Caspi, 2001)

- Life-course-persistent type:
  - Early onset
  - Increasing trend in severity of behavior into adulthood
- Adolescence-limited type:
  - Late onset
  - Transitory and temporary – *peer group & situational*

### **Developmental Pathways (continued)** (Loeber, et al., 2001)

- Authority Conflict Pathway
  - Defiance/disobedience
  - Leading to authority avoidance (truancy, running away)
  - Overt Pathway
  - Minor aggression
  - Leading to increasingly severe violence (rape, assault)
  - Covert Pathway
  - Minor covert delinquency (shoplifting)
  - Leading to moderate to serious delinquency (burglary)

#### **Authority Conflict Pathway**

- Stubborn behavior progresses to authority avoidance, (e.g., truancy, running away)
  - Early onset (usually before age 12)
  - More prevalent



#### **Covert Pathway**

- Minor acts (i.e., frequent lying) leads to moderate or serious delinquency (i.e., burglary)



#### **Overt pathway**

- Begins with minor aggression that progresses to incidences of physical fighting and then to serious violence (e.g., rape)
- Repetitive use of aggression rather than positive problem solving



### **Risk Factors Defined**

- Risk Factors: are characteristics or variables that have been associated with or contribute to the likelihood that a person will act violently taking into account situations, environments, and circumstances (*Fein & Vossekuil, 1998*).

### **Protective Factors Defined**

- Stabilizing or contra-indicators that decrease the level of risk for violence
  - e.g., availability of mental health treatment; strong social bonds; social supports (*Loeber, et al., 2001*)

### **Need for assessment**

*“Even if your thinking about the case led to the wrong conclusion, and perhaps a false negative, the fact that you considered each domain, and documented that you did, will go a long way toward convincing the jury that you made a good faith, carefully considered, honest mistake, rather than a negligent and careless call.”*

*-Meloy (2000, p. 15)*

### **Assessment Tools**

#### **Actuarial**

- Psychopathy Checklist- Youth Version
- Child & Adolescent Risk Evaluation-2
- Aggression Questionnaire
- Attitude Toward Guns and Violence

#### **SPJ**

- Early Assessment Risk List for Boys – Version 2
- Early Assessment Risk List for Girls
- Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth

### **Historical Items**

1. History of violence
2. History of non-violent offending
3. Early initiation of violence
4. Past supervision/Intervention failures
5. History of self-harm or suicide attempts
6. Exposure to violence in the home
7. Childhood history of maltreatment
8. Parental/Caregiver criminality
9. Early caregiver disruption
10. Poor school achievement

### **Social/Contextual Items**

1. Peer delinquency
2. Peer rejection
3. Stress and poor coping
4. Poor parental management
5. Lack of personal/social support
6. Community disorganization

### Individual Items

1. Negative attitudes
2. Risk taking/impulsivity
3. Substance use difficulties
4. Anger management problems
5. Low empathy/remorse
6. Attention deficit/hyperactivity difficulties
7. Poor compliance
8. Low interest/commitment to school

### Protective Factors

1. Pro-social involvement
2. Strong social support
3. Strong attachments and bonds
4. Positive attitude towards intervention and authority
5. Strong commitment to school
6. Resilient personality traits

### Case Study: Sarah C.

- *Incident Report:* Sarah was observed during a school assembly engaging in a nonverbal threat toward her peers, i.e., simulating the act of shooting, reloading, and aiming of a gun that was pointed toward other students on stage. During the interview with the assistant principal, Sarah became defiant, stating, "Why don't you just expel me. It is what you want." She also reported to the principal that she had access to a "sniper rifle at her home" and that she "know[s] how to use it."

### Factors

#### History

- History of violence
- History of self-harm/suicide attempts

#### Social/Contextual

- Peer rejection
- Stress and poor coping
- Poor parental management

### Factors (continued)

#### Individual

- Impulsivity
- Anger management problems

#### Protective

- Pro-social Involvement
- Strong social support
- Strong attachments and bonds
- Positive attitude toward intervention and authority
- Strong commitment to school

# Assessing Risk

## Evaluating Level of Risk

- A management-oriented approach is recommended (Meloy, 2000)
- This approach addresses the following:
  - Note instrumental vs. affective types of violence
  - Risk factors (present/absent)
  - Relationship of factor to level of risk
  - Intervention based on factors (static vs. dynamic)
  - Using historical factors address likely context and situational variables for violent behavior
  - Consequences if violent behavior (lethality)

## Level of Risk

- Is not determined by the number of risk factors noted (not a checklist).
- It is a summary of all of the information collected and weighted.
- Risk factors of a dynamic nature can be used as a guide for treatment and intervention efforts.

## Example of Levels of Risk

- Imminent Risk for Harm
- High Risk for Harm
- Moderate Risk for Harm
- Minor Risk for Harm
- Low or No Risk for Harm

## Imminent Risk for Harm

- An individual is, or is very close to, behaving in a way that is potentially dangerous to others.
  - Examples: Detailed threats, possession/use of weapons, serious physical fighting (e.g., aggravated assault)
  - Responses: immediate action to secure individual, arrest, notify parent, hospitalization, facility lock down, suspension pending assessment, protection and re-entry planning, ongoing case management

## High Risk for Harm

- Individual has demonstrated significant Early Warning Signs, significant Risk Factors or Precipitating Events, or few Protective Factors.
  - Examples: May not qualify for hospitalization or arrest, but require services and case management.
  - Responses: Immediate action to secure the individual, security responses, notify parent, suspension, psychological evaluation/consultation, protection and re-entry planning, ongoing case management.

### **Moderate Risk for Harm**

- The individual may be demonstrating some Early Warning Signs, existing Risk Factors or Precipitating Events, but may have some Protective Factors.
  - Examples: There may be evidence of emotional distress (depression, emotional withdrawal) in response to protracted bullying.
  - Responses: Security response, notify parent, psychological evaluation, protection planning, ongoing case management.

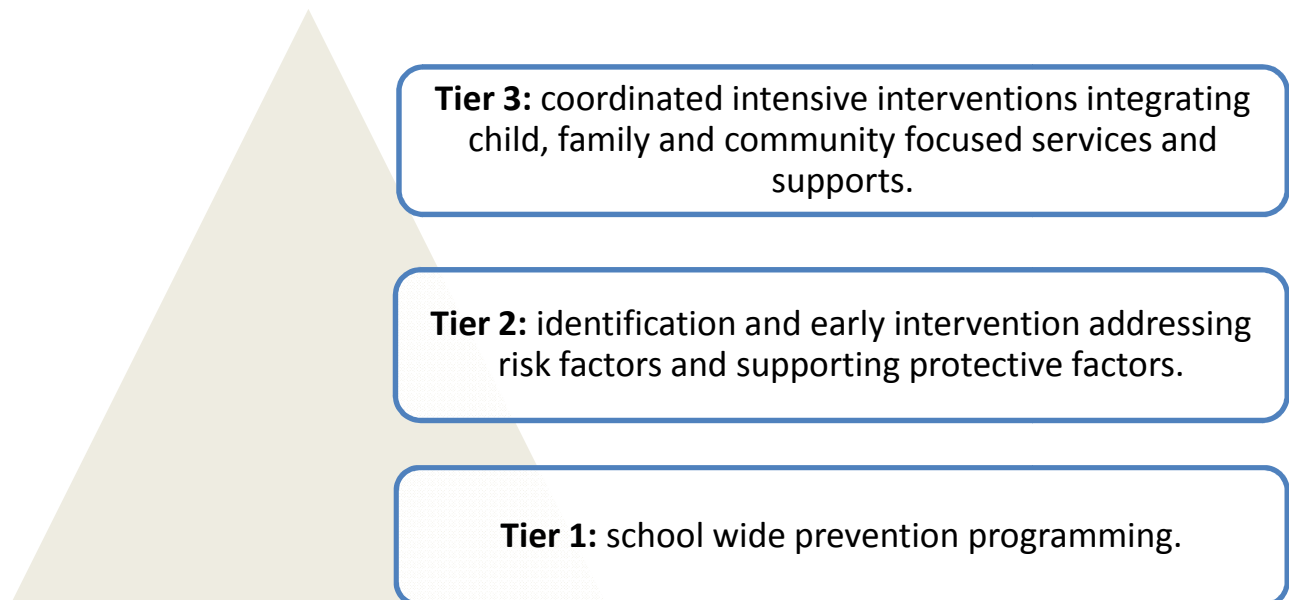
### **Minor Risk for Harm**

- Individual has demonstrated minor Early Warning Signs, but assessment reveals little evidence of significant Risk Factors or Precipitating events. Protective factors are well established.
  - Examples: unintentional infliction of harm, e.g., teasing taken too far.
  - Responses: parent notification, psychological consultation, review of school records, security response.

### **Low or No Risk for Harm**

- Upon further assessment, there is insufficient evidence for any risk for harm.
  - Examples: Misunderstandings, poor decision making, false accusations from peers.
  - Responses: investigation of the situation, notifications of findings to relevant parties (i.e., teachers or administrators).

### **A Three-Level Approach to Preventing Violence**



### **TIER I: Prevention**

- Development of strategic prevention planning grounded in school based needs (Furlong, et al., 2002; Larson, 2008)
- School wide foundation for all children that include strategies for supporting
  - positive discipline
  - academic success
  - mental and emotional wellness.



### **TIER I: Prevention (continued)**

- Environmental Design, e.g., security cameras
- Survey data (Cornell, et al., 2006)
- Early Warning Signs Guidelines (Dwyer, Osher & Warger, 1998)
- Second Step (Fitzgerald & VanSchoiack-Edstrom, 2006)
- School Wide Positive Behavioral Support (Sprague & Horner, 2006; Sugai, Horner, McIntosh, 2008)
- Peer mediation programs (Manning & Bucher, 2007)

### **TIER II: Early Intervention**

(Dwyer & Osher, 2000)

- Create services and supports that:
  - Address risk factors
  - Develop protective factors

### **TIER II: Early Intervention (continued)**

- Group based intervention
  - Aggression Replacement Training (Goldstein & Glick, 2002)
  - The Anger Coping Program (Larson & Lochman, 2005)
  - Think First (Larson, 2005)

### **TIER III: Intensive & Collaborative Interventions**

- Establishing collaborative community partnerships between schools, families, mental health providers, and law enforcement
- Emphasis on student *needs* and *strengths* (Dwyer & Osher, 2000)

### **TIER III: Intensive & Collaborative Interventions (continued)**

- Empirically supported treatment modalities:
  - Multisystemic Therapy (Curtis & Ronan, 2004)
  - Multidimensional Family Therapy (Hogue, Liddle, Becker, & Johnson–Leckrone, 2002)
  - Case management (Telleen, Kim, Stewart-Nava, Pesce, & Maher, 2006)
- Complete listing available through *OJJDP*:

[http://www.dsgonline.com/mpg2.5//TitleV\\_MPG\\_INTRO\\_Splash.asp](http://www.dsgonline.com/mpg2.5//TitleV_MPG_INTRO_Splash.asp)

### **CASE STUDY: JASON B.**

*Incident Report:* Jason, after a brief altercation with another student, was referred to you by the school for making a threat to kill another student. Upon meeting with the Assistant Principal, Jason continued to make the threat and said he had threatened his mother yesterday.

*Note:* Jason had threatened to “shoot” the student in question. Also, stating, “I’m going to get my friends and go over to your house and kill you.” After being suspended from school, it was reported to school administrators that Jason has attempted to make contact with the targeted student outside of school.

**Factors**

**Historical**

- History of violence
- History of non-violent offending
- Past supervision/intervention failure
- History of Suicide attempts
- Parent criminality
- Poor school achievement

**Social contextual**

- Peer delinquency
- Stress and poor coping
- Poor parental management

**Factors (continued)**

**Individual**

- Negative attitudes
- Risk taking/Impulsivity
- Substance use difficulties
- Anger management problems
- Low empathy/remorse
- ADHD
- Poor compliance

**Protective**

- Strong attachments and bonds

**LEVEL OF RISK?**

- Imminent Risk for Harm
- High Risk for Harm
- Moderate Risk for Harm
- Minor Risk for Harm
- Low or No Risk for Harm

**Interventions**

**Risk Factor**

- Substance use
- Poor coping
- Anger management



- Parental management



- Poor academic achievement



**Intervention**

- Access to counseling and mental health services

- Family therapy and training

- Other: Structured educational program