

Structured Professional Judgment Tools

The Big Picture

Whether we are highly trained, experienced professionals or new to the field of risk assessment, evaluating a subject's risk of violence is challenging.¹ This is due to a variety of factors, including: professionals differ in their training, experiences, and expertise; each case is unique and the circumstances vary considerably; and all people are susceptible to a variety of cognitive biases that may affect their decisions. Ultimately, however, organizations look to us to evaluate an uncertain future and provide actionable guidance to prevent violence. Fortunately, structured professional judgment (SPJ) tools are designed to help trained evaluators systematize the complicated process and maximize the likelihood of prevention.

The Challenge: Violence risk assessment takes a significant amount of time and involves a number of stakeholders who may have different needs. What tools are available to build consensus around a violence risk mitigation strategy?

The SPJ Approach

The SPJ approach to risk management is “an analytical method used to understand and mitigate the risk for interpersonal violence posed by individual people that is discretionary in essence but relies on evidence-based guidelines to systematize the exercise of discretion.”² Unlike the unstructured approach that derives assessments from an individual's impressions and professional experience, SPJ is a data-driven, systematic approach designed to enable transparency and consistency without any loss of flexibility.³

SPJ tools are designed to assist threat assessment teams during the full assessment cycle, from identification through management and communication.⁴ They are developed and validated by subject matter experts, and are grounded in theory, research, and practice. Each tool includes a set of scientifically validated risk factors that together result in a risk category (*i.e.*, high/medium/low) rather than a static risk score. As a result, SPJ tools allow for a dynamic assessment process in which risk may fluctuate as additional information becomes available and/or conditions change.

About this Series

The Threat Lab White Paper Series is intended to provide empirically-informed, operationally-relevant best practices to Insider Threat Program Hubs. White Papers are collaboratively authored by members of the Psychosocial Risk & Insider Management Experts (PRIME) Panel, an advisory entity assembled to assist The Threat Lab, based on issues suggested by stakeholders.

PRIME
Psychosocial Risk & Insider Management Experts

About The Threat Lab

The Defense Personnel and Security Research Center (PERSEREC) established The Threat Lab in 2018 to realize the DoD Insider Threat Program Director's vision to integrate the social and behavioral sciences into the mission space.

For more information or to suggest a topic for a future White Paper, please email dodhra.ThreatLab@mail.mil

SPJ Tools

SPJ tools will not overcome incomplete or inaccurate data, but when selected and used appropriately by trained personnel, they can be valuable additions to a comprehensive risk management program. There are a variety of SPJ tools available that have been designed with specific uses in mind, and the visualization below lists a number of validated tools across six types of violence.



¹Lidz, C., Mulvey, E., & Gardner, W. (1993). The accuracy of predictions of violence to others. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 269, 1007–1011; Monahan, J. (1981). *The clinical prediction of violent behavior*. U.S. Government Printing Office; Monahan, J. (2007). The scientific status of research on clinical and actuarial predictions of violence. In Faigman, D. L., Kaye, D. H., Saks, M. J., Sanders, J., & Cheng E. (Eds.), *Modern scientific evidence: The law and science of expert testimony* (pp. 122–147). West Group.

²Hart, S. D., Douglas, K. S., & Guy, L. S. (2016). The Structured Professional Judgment Approach to violence risk assessment: Origins, nature, and advances. *The Wiley handbook on the theories, assessment and treatment of sexual offending*, 643–666.

³Belfrage, H., & Ekman, L. (2013). Threat assessment of targeted honor-based violence. In Meloy, J. R., & Hoffmann, J. (Eds.), *International handbook of threat assessment* (pp. 260–271). Oxford University Press.

⁴Douglas, K. S., Cox, D. N., & Webster, C. D. (1999). Violence risk assessment: Science and practice. *Legal and criminological psychology*, 4(2), 149–184.