Recommendations for Interpreting Multiple Norms for the Static-99

R. Karl Hanson & David Thornton
Commentary at the 27th Annual Research and Treatment Conference of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, Atlanta, Georgia, October 23, 2008
Why do we need multiple norms?

• Base Rates matter!
• The expected recidivism rate for members of a risk category is jointly determined by
  – The factors measured by Static-99
  – Other factors (i.e., base rate)
• Observed differences in base rates are large enough to make a practical difference to the expected recidivism rates
What this means

• Evaluators cannot, in an unqualified way, associate a single recidivism estimate with a particular Static-99 score
So what does Static-99 measure?

- Static-99 scores can be considered as indexing the relative degree to which certain static, historical risk factors are present.
What Do We Mean by Base Rate?

- Expected recidivism rate per score
- Determined by factors external to Static-99
- Risk or protective factors that would be expected to be present for most offenders in a group regardless of their scores.
For many practical applications, relative risk is sufficient

- Static-99 (and similar instruments) are commonly used to guide resource allocation
  - more resources are assigned to managing offenders who present more risk

- For resource allocation, we recommend
  - Percentiles
  - Interpreting the whole sample 5 and 10 year recidivism estimates (derived through Logistic Regression) as a measure of relative risk.
Sometimes evaluators have to make judgments about absolute risk levels

• Recidivism estimates for a given Static-99 score can be considered bounded
  – at the low end by the CSC Routine samples recidivism estimates
  – at the high end by the High Risk samples recidivism estimates
Rates for Specific Case

• Evaluators who wish to determine where in this range is the risk for a specific offender need to consider the extent to which the offender and his circumstances resemble:
  The typical member of the CSC Routine samples
  Versus
  The typical member of the High Risk samples
CSC Samples are clearly defined

- Under current Canadian legislation and policy, there is a relatively clear distinction between
  - Routine CSC Offenders
  - Detained (Warrant Expiry) Offenders
Other Contexts

• In other contexts a significant degree of clinical analysis and judgment is will be required

• It is not yet known how well evaluators can perform this task.

• Clinical analysis of this kind is generally better done when it is supported by some structure
The typical member of a CSC routine sample would experience a range of protective factors

- Rich program participation based on the Risk/Need/Responsivity model
- Have shown at least moderate cooperation with these rehabilitative efforts
- Informed modern supervision, often including community treatment
Typical Member of the CSC Detention/Warrant Expiry Group

• The normal CSC protective factors are largely absent or compromised

• Additional indicators of risk are present
  – Resisted rehabilitative efforts
  – Active antisocial behavior during the current sentence

• Note that these additional indicators of risk should be beyond what would be typical for someone with his Static-99 score
Non-CSC settings

• Future research will be needed to provide additional and more clear cut ways of defining high base rate populations

• Encourage collection of local norms
THANK YOU!!!


And other co-authors...