

The Criminal Justice Coordinating Council for the District of Columbia

INFORMATION SESSION

RISK ASSESSMENT IN ADULT CRIMINAL JUSTICE AGENCIES

Hear From:

- PSA, CSOSA, BOP, and the Urban Institute

Learn About:

- Risk Assessment Tools Used in the District
- How Tools Support Agency Decision-Making
- Best Practices for Implementation
- Opportunities for Collaboration

🕒 2:00 - 3:30 pm

📅 August 26, 2025

📍 11th Floor, Room 1107
441 4th Street, NW

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Introduction

Risk assessment is a form of data-driven actuarial analysis that assists with decision making around supervision, management, and treatment of justice-involved populations. These tools input a variety of factors including static factors like age, gender, past criminal history and dynamic factors like employment status, drug use, or living situations to produce a risk score. The scores reflect a person's risk of recidivism, risk of not appearing in court, and/or the level of case management needed. In Washington, D.C., multiple agencies deploy different risk assessment tools to evaluate the populations they oversee. This information session brought together subject matter experts in risk assessment at various agencies to discuss how they utilize risk assessment tools to support public safety and the fair administration of justice.

Panelists included Samuel Hall from the Bureau of Prisons, Dr. Debra Kamfi and Cedric Hendricks from the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency, Demond Tigs from the Pretrial Service Agency, and Dr. KiDeuk Kim from the Urban Institute.

Presentation on Risk Assessment

Dr. KiDeuk Kim, Senior Fellow at the Urban Institute, described the use of risk assessment instruments in the adult criminal justice system. Risk assessment is a structured process to assess the likelihood that an individual will engage in certain outcomes. Risk assessment quantifies risk by calculating the probability that a particular outcome, such as recidivism, will occur and assigns people into risk categories based on that probability.

The core components of risk assessment include collecting information on risk factors, calculating the risk score, classifying individuals' risk scores into risk categories, and customizing the justice system response. While the design of risk assessment tools matters, how the tools are implemented matters just as much. Risk assessment should be validated to ensure that the tool predicts the outcome as intended (e.g., how well do the predictions align with what we see in practice?) Risk validation is important to make sure that the tools work in the way they are intended and in an equitable manner. Populations, conditions, and agencies evolve over time and risk assessment tools need to be recalibrated to reflect those changes.

Risk assessment is important to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and consistency of a criminal justice response. In the modern age, risk assessment implementers must consider issues around equity, generalizability, AI, and transparency for their tools to maintain trust in their application.

Panel Interview

Panelists answered questions on a variety of relevant topics. Most agreed that their risk assessment tools served as evidence-based quantifiers to determine the risk of an individual reoffending. Agencies then use that information to determine the level of security and types of conditions needed to keep the public safe. Risk assessment tools, used in conjunction with needs assessment tools, can also help to identify appropriate programming for justice-involved individuals.

CSOSA uses multiple dynamic risk assessment tools that measure the risk of reoffending and identify protentional needs for a justice-involved individual. These tools are integrated into their case management system and tabulate risk scores based on information available in the system without staff having to enter it separately. Risk factors include static factors like criminal history, age, and gender as well as dynamic ones such as employment, peer groups, and family relationships. When an individual's risk level changes, staff receive an automated notification and can decide how to address the change in risk level. Having the risk tools embedded in CSOSA's case management system allows staff to see risk changes in real time and to respond with appropriate interventions in a timely manner. The integrated system also facilitates the implementation of case planning which is based on the risks and needs identified by the tools.

PSA uses a risk assessment tool specifically calibrated to data in the DC population to evaluate those under pretrial supervision for rearrest and return to court. PSA's risk assessment tool is also integrated into its case management system. When staff enter information into the system, it automatically tabulates a score. All staff are trained in how to enter information into the system and interpret results. PSA also has quality assurance processes in place to ensure that data input is accurate and complete for all cases. In addition, the risk assessment tool is re-validated on a regular basis. Something unique to PSA is their consideration of judicial concurrence which refers to whether PSA's release recommendations are in line with the Court's decision-making. PSA's judicial concurrence rate is about 82%.

BOP has multiple assessment tools, but its main risk assessment tool to evaluate the risk of recidivism is called PATTERN, which was implemented in accordance with the First Step Act. National Institute of Justice (NIJ) researchers helped develop BOP's recidivism risk tool and re-validates the tool annually. The PATTERN is normed based on sex, age, and other demographic factors and was integrated into already existing business processes and therefore did not require much staff training. BOP staff enter relevant information, including criminal history, history of sex offenses, violent offenses, drug use, and education, into their case management system which generates a risk score (risk factors include etc.) that can be increased or reduced based on an incarcerated person's behavior and participation in programming. For individuals convicted in DC, BOP considers the federal convictions equivalent to the D.C. Code to assess risk.

PSA and CSOSA noted that they did not collaborate with other agencies on the development of their tools, though BOP did work with the NIJ in the creation of their tool. These agencies do collaborate with others when providing recommendations about treatment and security levels based on risk assessment. For potential improvements, CSOSA noted that it would be helpful for them to automatically receive rearrest data from MD, DC, and VA, while BOP explained that the use of AI could help improve efficiency by digesting the information contained in long reports and breaking it up into data points for staff to review and evaluate.

Audience Q&A:

Audience members had a few questions for the panelists about their risk assessment tools. For example, panelists highlighted that their data input into the tools comes from a variety of sources including defendant interviews, criminal histories, drug tests, and other case management information. Panelists also emphasized how risk assessment tools do not often focus on justice-involved individuals' strengths, but that is where needs assessments and case management is involved. When asked about risk factors, BOP had 13 risk categories, PSA noted 43 risk factors, and CSOSA emphasized the inclusion of both static and dynamic risk factors. All participants' agencies' risk assessment tools included factors like criminal history and severity of arrest.

One audience member expressed concern about the lack of access to risk assessment score information for defense attorneys. It was noted that this information may be accessible through FOIA requests, and that the public is made aware of what risk factors are considered in score creation. Dr. Kim noted that he has worked with PSA, CSOSA, and BOP and while the information underlying the risk assessments is not available to the public, DC is a decade ahead of other jurisdictions in terms of using state-of-the-art risk assessment tools. Different risk assessment tools measure different risks. PSA's risk assessment is about failure to appear (FTA) risk and public safety risk. Correctional settings risks tools are more about ensuring that adequate supervision is provided in facilities. There are certain risk factors that may not be legally relevant for pretrial or community supervision but will be legally relevant in a correctional setting (e.g., impulsivity).

Lastly, panelists received a question about why information regarding risk assessment is not shared with other agencies. All agencies underscored that risk assessment is designed for individuals in specific stages in the justice system (pretrial, incarceration, or supervision) and outside this setting, the risk assessment may not be relevant. Different risk assessments measure different things, so they are not generalizable to all settings.

At the end, panelists highlighted that what is most important in this work is risk management and abatement through case management services. Risk assessment tools are one piece of the puzzle that informs their professional judgment. It's important to also focus on community engagement (justice-involved individuals, their families, the communities they hail from) to maximize people's success. The assessment tool is used to increase engagement.