Neuropsychology can enhance violence risk assessment: Opportunities and limitations for mental health professionals

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Background

- VRA is an established component of FMHA for a variety of legal questions
- VRA has exhibited validity in predicting violence
  - Structured professional judgment: HCR-20, SAVRY
  - Actuarial measures: LS/CMI, VRAG, COVR, PCL-R
- But, based on self report data and consistent evidence of “ceiling effect” in predictive validity for these measures
- Growing concern in legal field regarding admissibility and reliability of VRA
- Contemporary theories of violence integrate psychological, biological, and situational factors
- Neuropsychology may provide promising theoretical and empirical basis to enhance validity of VRA

VRA and neuropsychological assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neuropsychological domains relevant to VRA</th>
<th>VRA with items informed by neuropsychology</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impulsivity</td>
<td>Impulsivity and inhibition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>Attention deficits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>Decision making deficits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concept formation</td>
<td>Rule following behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental flexibility</td>
<td>Ability to modify behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Verbal fluency</td>
<td>Verbal intelligence and abilities</td>
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</tbody>
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Conclusion

- Neuropsychological assessment may increase the clinical and legal validity of VRA
- Current lack of empirical literature
- Importantly limitations in training and experience
- Implications and future directions
  - Validation studies, particularly predictive incremental validity studies
  - Cross-training between forensic psychology and neuropsychology
  - Procedural consensus regarding referrals and assessment

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Adapted from Yang & Raine (2009)

Neuropsychology of violence

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