NEWSLETTER

Project RISCO – Research Summary

September 2012

Project RISCO

Project **Risk Management and Assessment** (in short, Project *Risco*) was promoted by the Portuguese Probation Service (*Direção-Geral de Reinserção Social* – DGRS), Ministry of Justice, from the 1st October 2009 to the 30th September 2011. The Project had the financial support of the European Commission, Directorate-General Justice, Freedom and Security, on the scope of the Programme Prevention and Fight Against Crime (Specific agreement JLS/2009/ISEC/FP/C1 – 4000000071).

Partners of the Project were Xunta de Galicia – Dirección General de Xustiza and the Probation Service of Ireland.

AIMS

Project Risco aimed at developing assessment and management practices in the Portuguese Probation Service (DGRS), by nationally implementing a risk/needs assessment system for adult and late adolescent offenders, based on the adaptation of a fourth generation instrument – the Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (LS/CMI; Andrews, Bonta & Wormith, 2004).

Phases

The Project developed in three main phases:

I. Translation and adaptation of the LS/CMI and service mobilization and preparation of probation officers to the use of this new methodology, including staff training actions and close articulation with national and international experts.

II. Collection of data through the administration of the LS/CMI in a sample of offenders from the Portuguese Probation Service and a case follow-up, which was closely monitored by the Project team.

III. Data analysis and conclusion of the Portuguese version of the LS/CMI, followed by nation-wide training actions, the design of implementation guidelines and the dissemination of the Project's results.

THE RESEARCH

Any adaptation and implementation of a risk assessment instrument requires previous scientific validation studies. On the scope of the Project Risco, a study was developed with the goals of performing preliminary analyses on the psychometric properties of the Portuguese version of the LS/CMI, namely, internal consistency and predictive validity.

Since offender characterization studies in Portugal are scarce, the collected data was also subject to an in-depth descriptive and bivariate analysis, in order to explore socio-demographic and criminal profiles and cultural specificities of Portuguese offenders.

It was expected that the findings from this study would provide a first basis of support for a reliable and valid use of the LS/CMI with the DGRS Portuguese of offenders. It was also intended that this research would create the foundations to future methodological improved validation studies.

To fulfill these goals, a sample of 647 community and prison offenders supervised by the DGRS were assessed with the LS/CMI and prospectively followed-up for 6 to 9 months. During this period, general recidivism occurrences were recorded.

Summary of Findings

Offender profiles

❖ The typical offender supervised by the Portuguese Probation service is male (89.5%), about 37 years old (M=37.25; SD=12.45), is of Portuguese nationality (93.5%), has an intimate relationship (51.6%) although marital status may be single (62%), lives with the partner and/or children (39.5%) in urban areas (56.3%), completed 2nd level education (34.2%), has some form of occupation in the community (45%) or is integrated on paid activities in prison (43.6%) and has an income close to the Portuguese minimum wage (M=418.96; SD=492.60).

❖ Is under community supervision (82.7%), more specifically on probation (63.7%), committed property-related offences (31.8%) and had at least one co-accused (55.3%), have no specific treatment activities during supervision or is being treated for addiction problems (15.8%), and had the first conviction when he was about 28 years old (M=28.44; SD=11.06).

❖ Has a medium risk/need (LS/CMI Section total score: M=14.85; SD=8.17) and problem areas include Leisure/recreation (M=1.53; SD=.66), followed by Companions (M=1.89; SD=1.36) and Education/Employment (M=3.98; SD=2.86).

Offender profiles (Cont.)

- ❖ Income is negatively related to risk ($r=-.43$, $p<.01$) and need, especially with Education/Employment ($r=-.52$, $p<.01$) and recidivist offenders tend to have significant lower mean income values than non-recidivist offenders (M=222.69, SD=325.65 vs M=430.54, SD=498.78, respectively).

- ❖ Inmates tend to show higher a risk (LS/CMI Section 1 total score M=18.71; SD=8.34) than offenders in the community (LS/CMI Section 1 total score M=14.04; SD=7.91) and also higher outcome events (10.5% vs 5.6%, respectively), although this last result may be due to an easiest detection by the formal justice system.

- ❖ Need areas vary between inmates and community offenders. Inmates have more problems related to an Antisocial Pattern (M=.96; SD=.99), while community offenders have more problems related to Procriminal Attitude/Orientation (M=1.10; SD=1.25).

- ❖ Surprisingly, the length of the sentence correlates negatively with risk (e.g., for inmates $r=-.24$, $p<.05$), which can be interpreted a result of a positive effect of supervision. However, the duration of the sentence did not distinguish recidivists and non-recidivists during the follow-up period.

Offender profiles (Cont.)

❖ Property-related offenders (LS/CMI Section 1 total score M=16.99; SD=8.48) and road offenders (LS/CMI Section 1 total score M=17.86; SD=6.92) are at a higher risk of recidivism than other offenders, namely violent offenders. Results show that the needs of offenders tend to be related to the type of offence. For instance, in acquisitive offences (i.e., property-related) need tend to lie on Education/Employment (M=4.66; SD=1.18), as well as on an Antisocial Pattern (M=1.27; SD=1.11) revealed by these offenders.

❖ An early age of first conviction is related to higher risk ($r=-.32$, $p<.01$) and, as expected, recidivist offenders tend to have an earlier age of first conviction (M=23.37, SD=11.6 vs M=28.82, SD=8.33 for non-recidivists).

❖ Mental or personality disorders are not prevalent among this sample of offenders. Specific criminogenic factors rise around skills deficits and a significant proportion of offenders seem to have motivational barriers to intervention.

❖ Although sample results reproduce the main demographic and criminal-legal characteristics of the population, it is early to take this distribution as normative data for Portuguese offenders. The inmate sub-group refers to a fairly smaller sample than community offenders.

❖ A short term follow-up period of 6 to 9 months captured mainly probation violations, but also criminal behavior occurrences and mostly confirmed by official sources. 6.5% offenders showed at least one occurrence during the follow-up.

Reliability and validity of the LS/CMI

❖ The LS/CMI Section 1 on this sample of Portuguese offenders showed good internal consistency coefficients (e.g., overall Cronbach's alpha for Section .90) and expected patterns of total-subcomponent intercorrelations (e.g., Criminal History has the highest correlations with Companions, Alcohol/Drug Problem and Procriminal Attitude/Orientation), replicating the results of international studies (e.g., Andrews et al., 2004; Raynor et al., 2000).

❖ Analyses of predictive validity were affected by the outcome low base rate. However, and as expected, recidivists tend to score higher on Section 1 (M=20.79, SD=7.92 vs M=14.43, SD=8.03 for non-recidivists) and the proportion of general recidivism increased as risk levels increased.

❖ AUC index show good predictive validity for the LS/CMI total score regarding general recidivism (AUC=.72), which remain when considering inmates (AUC=.72) and community offenders separately (AUC=.70).

❖ More predictive areas vary between inmates and community offenders. Antisocial Pattern is the most predictive subcomponent for inmates (AUC=.72), Procriminal Attitude/Orientation is the most predictive for community offenders (AUC=.70).

❖ The relative prevalence and predictive power of problem areas in this sample of offenders differs from international samples, which can be attributed to cultural differences and highlights the importance of conducting local studies to characterize the target population and test the validity of a risk/need assessment instrument implementation.

❖ Override decisions, which happened in about 6.8% of assessments and more often to increase risk levels, confer a higher accuracy to the recidivism predictions (AUC=.66 for Final vs AUC=.63 for Score based risk/need level), thus demonstrating the importance of professional discretion to risk/need assessment.

Main Conclusions

The current study allowed an in-depth knowledge of the population under supervision of the DGRS – Portuguese Probation Service – regarding socio-demographic and legal-criminal characteristics, as well as risk and need profiles. The identification of groups more vulnerable to recidivism and the verification that a greater risk is related to the effective outcome occurrence can help promote the implementation of management strategies adapted to actual and priority needs.

Despite methodological limitations, good indicators of LS/CMI internal consistency and predictive validity in this sample of offenders provided preliminary evidence on the Portuguese version of the LS/CMI psychometric properties, in line with the results of international reference studies (e.g., Andrews et al., 2004; Raynor et al., 2000). Notwithstanding the need for further investigation, these preliminary results show the LS/CMI appears to be a useful and assessment of risk/need, highly relevant for the modernization and efficacy of Portuguese case management practices.

Summary of Project Achievements

Project RISCO allowed the national implementation of a fourth generation risk assessment and management system – LS/CMI^{TM} - in DGRS that will continue after the financial support of the European Commission.

Now an adapted, validated and generalized instrument for risk assessment – LS/CMI^{TM} - is available to DGRS as a means to support the work of consulting near the Courts and as a basis in the execution of community measures.

The implementation of the LS/CMI^{TM} was sustained by a scientific validation of this instrument, along with the in-depth characterization of offender profiles. National and international research on anti-social behavior was enriched by this study.

Case assessment and management strategies were thus renewed and improved and institutional practices were redirected. From now on more effective and efficient services can be delivered, by matching appropriate management strategies to the assessment results and by systematically evaluating the outcome of interventions.

The implementation of such a system contributes to an internal and participated mechanism for systematic evaluation of interventions and their efficiency.

A database software was created, providing a system for collecting data about the target population of the probation services that can be statistically analyzed, shared and compared with other countries, namely EU members, on a regular basis.

Training activities increased the knowledge of technical staff about risk/needs assessment and qualified them for the use of LS/CMI^{TM}.

Partnerships were established at a national level with universities and among European Community countries with experts and professional counterparts, which facilitated the research on criminal behavior and intervention practices. Sharing of knowledge and results with partners and other countries constituted added values to the Project.

The theoretical and practical framework of the Project followed the standards of good and evidence practices already existing in European countries, which were reinforced by a close exchange of experiences with international partners and experts.

According to the institutional guidelines included in a Procedure Manual, the use of the LS/CMI^{TM} will be a part of the DGRS work practices. The agreement made with MHS during the Project contemplates the right to use the LS/CMI^{TM} in Portugal.

Products of the Project, such as the internal software database, will continue to be used. Data will undergo regular statistical analysis in order to monitor offenders and make outcome evaluations.

Future staff training will be delivered in order to assure the skills of those using these new work methodologies. The internal DGRS training plan for 2013 already contemplates further training on risk assessment and management in general and the LS/CMI^{TM} in particular.

References

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