PPCJI Pennsylvania Partnership for Criminal Justice Improvement

Advantages of Statewide Implementation of the ORAS - November 2021

The EBP Committee of the County Chief Adult Probation and Parole Officers Association of Pennsylvania (CCAPPOAP) is interested in continuing the discussion of adopting one risk-needs assessment tool across all Pennsylvania adult probation and parole departments. The first goal of the EBP Strategic Plan calls for the "routine and effective use of actuarial assessments for purposes of pretrial and post-conviction placement and supervision, and programming." The EBP Statewide Leadership Team recognizes the importance of local autonomy and the value in diversity of practices as long as those practices are aligned with research. For these reasons, several years ago, the EBP Statewide Leadership Team and Pennsylvania Council on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) determined that it would support two actuarial assessments for use in post-adjudicated cases: the Level of Services Inventory-Revised/Level of Services Inventory Case Management Inventory (LSI-R or LS/CMI) and the Ohio Risk Assessment System (ORAS). These instruments have similar rearrest prediction accuracy rates and are widely recognized as both effective and user-friendly.

For purposes of assessing risk and need at the post-adjudication level, Pennsylvania counties are currently using the ORAS, LSI-R, LS/CMI, Wisconsin, APPD & AAI, COMPAS, and in-house tools. While all these assessments use similar risk factors and predict recidivism similarly there are distinct advantages to using third and fourth generational tools (see insert). As of August 2021, a total of 50 out of 66 counties are using the ORAS; 7 LSI-R or LS/CMI; 5 other (e.g., COMPAS or in-house); 2 Wisconsin; and 2 none. Some counties have indicated that they will likely be moving to the ORAS soon.

The fact that a large majority of the Pennsylvania counties are/will be using the ORAS provides some advantages to the application of evidence-based practices on a statewide basis. To that end, the EBP Committee strongly encourages all counties to consider adopting the ORAS. While there are one-time training costs associated with switching assessment tools, the universal use of the same risk/need assessment tool statewide affords some compelling advantages to probation and parole.

Risk Assessment Generations

First Generation: An unstructured process using professional judgment and an interview. (Example: an intake interview.)

Second Generation: A structured process with an actuarial analysis to isolate static variables statistically related to recidivism. (Example: the Wisconsin Risk Assessment.)

Third Generation: A structured process with an actuarial analysis to isolate static and dynamic variables statistically related to recidivism. (Example: the LSI-R.)

Fourth Generation: A structured process with an actuarial analysis to isolate static and dynamic variables statistically related to recidivism, identify responsivity factors, and link the risk factors to a case plan. (Example: the LS/CMI, ORAS, or COMPAS.)

Advantage One: Lower assessment use costs. Most risk assessment tools cost on a per-use basis. Some, like the Wisconsin assessment, are in the public domain and have no costs associated with it other than training, if available. In-house assessments have high initial, upfront costs during the developmental stage and none thereafter other than to maintain the software. The vendors of the LSI-R, LSI/CMI, COMPAS, STR/ONG, SPIN, and most other assessments charge assessment fees. There are no costs associated with the ORAS except for training (see below).

Advantage Two: Greater consistency and less duplication. Consistency across jurisdictions is improved when the entire state uses the same risk/need assessment tool. This promotes smoother communication and case management when transferring cases between counties. Language can get confusing when departments use different terminology, criminogenic need domains, responsivity factors, and intervention descriptors. Furthermore, departments would not need to redo an assessment if the transferred case used the same assessment instrument, and it would make reassessment easier to conduct.

Advantage Three: Improved data comparison. As process and outcome data are collected across counties, comparisons can more easily be made when drawing from the same assessment. One can more confidently examine outcomes from county to county based on risk scores such as, looking at clients who scored a specified range on the instrument. Furthermore, if at some point funding streams link resources to risk level, there would be less difficulty in understanding the client profile across counties. Probation departments can automate ORAS either through the University of Cincinnati (UC) or by partnering with their own software company through a licensing agreement with UC.

Advantage Four: Conversion to a universal case plan. The Pennsylvania Partnership for Criminal Justice Improvement (PPCJI)'s EBP Committee is responsible for overseeing the strategic plan goal of examining the practicality of adopting a statewide use of a Pennsylvania-specific case plan. A universal case plan would be more achievable if all the adult probation and parole departments were using the same assessment and set of risk factors.

ORAS Costs

While there are no costs to use the ORAS, staff must be trained on the proper use of the tool

Training Class	Class size and flat rate costs
End user training for assessors	In-person: 2 days, up to 30 individuals, $7,000 Virtual: 4 half-days, up to 15 individuals, $6,500
Training of trainers	In-person: 2 days, up to 6 individuals, $11,750 or up to 12 individuals, $20,000 Virtual: 10 half-days, up to 6 individuals, $11,250

Training of Trainers (TOT) requirements: Participants must complete the end user training for assessors, receive certification to conduct ORAS assessments, and conduct at least 15 live assessments with clients. The TOT training consists of classroom training; practicing delivering portions of the end user training to each other; and being observed training end users in a live setting.