



Department of Psychology Colloquium Series



Talking the talk: Improving risk communication in the Criminal Justice System

Thursday September 28th
2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Tory 340



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Forensic risk assessment has become a ubiquitous practice within the Criminal Justice System (CJS), informing decisions such as parole release, institutional placement, and severity and length of sentencing. This has given rise to a proliferation of risk assessment tools available for predicting a number of different outcomes (e.g., sexual vs. violent reoffending). Despite the reliance that the CJS places on risk assessment and the fact that hundreds of risk assessment tools exist, there is currently no consensus on how to compare, contrast, or combine the information provided by different risk assessment scales or on how to appropriately communicate risk information to decision makers. As a potential solution to these limitations, a Five-Level Risk and Needs System (Hanson et al., 2017) was created for classifying offenders based on their risk for reoffending and based on their treatability and management potential. Importantly, this classification system can be applied to any existing risk assessment scale. By creating a common language, these five levels are meant to aid clinicians, correctional practitioners, and decision makers across jurisdictions in understanding and correctly utilizing risk assessment information. The goals of this talk are therefore to 1) provide an overview of the limitations associated with current risk communication strategies, 2) explain the process for creating the Five Risk and Need categories for any risk assessment scale, and 3) present the most recent empirical evaluation of the construct validity of these categories as applied to an actuarial risk assessment scale.