

Overview of the Washington ONE Risk Assessment Tool

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Purpose:

The Washington Offender Needs Evaluation (Washington ONE) is a fourth-generation dynamic risk and needs assessment tool (Andrews & Bonta, 2006; Andrews & Bonta, 2010) used by the Washington State Department of Corrections (WADOC). It serves two primary functions: (1) to group individuals into six low to high risk categories of risk of re-offense, impacting community supervision standards, and (2) assessing individuals criminogenic needs from low to high across eight domains, impacting treatment program planning and prioritization as part of continuous case management.

History of DOC Risk Assessment Tools:

The use of risk assessment tools by WADOC has largely been driven by two pieces of legislation: (1) the 1999 Offender Accountability Act (OAA) that set state policy regarding the intensity of community supervision, and (2) Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5288, Chapter 375, Laws of 2009, which requires WADOC to use a risk assessment tool “recommended to the department by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) as having the highest degree of predictive accuracy for assessing an offender’s risk of re-offense”.

Prior to 1999, WADOC did not use a formal risk assessment tool, instead relying on clinical and professional judgement to determine risk and community supervision levels. After the establishment of the OAA, WADOC began use of the Level of Service Inventory Revised (LSI-R) as the risk for re-offense portion of the Risk Management Identification (RMI) system. In 2003 WSIPP conducted a study of the LSI-R and found that the predictive validity of the tool could be strengthened by including more data on prior criminal history (Barnoski & Aos, 2003). Following this study WADOC asked WSIPP to develop a new static risk instrument. In 2008, WADOC began using the WSIPP developed Static Risk Assessment (SRA) and shortly thereafter the Static Risk Assessment Revised (SRA2), second generation tools based on demographics and criminal history (Barnoski & Drake, 2007).

In 2012 WADOC approached WSIPP to conduct an evaluation to determine if a new risk assessment under consideration by WADOC had a higher degree of predictive accuracy than the currently used and other equivalent risk assessment tools. WSIPP conducted a systematic review of the literature on risk assessments validated in Washington State and found that the department-procured tool, the Static Risk and Offender Needs Guide – Revised (STRONG-R) had the highest predictive accuracy of an offender’s risk of re-offense (Drake, 2014).

Development and Design of the Current Tool:

The Washington ONE, previously known as the STRONG-R, was created from 2013-2016 through a partnership between WADOC and Washington State University (WSU) and the Washington State Institute for Criminal Justice Research (WSICJ), led by Dr. Zachary Hamilton. Like the SRA and the SRA2, the STRONG-R was designed specifically for the Washington state correctional and supervised population. It is classified as a fourth-generation risk assessment tool utilizing both static and dynamic risk factors

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associated with the Risk Needs and Responsivity model (Hamilton et al., 2016a). In September 2016, the tool was renamed via a vote of WADOC staff to the Washington ONE.

The Washington ONE was developed using historical WADOC records related to population, SRA results, ONA results, correctional events, and recidivism data. This allowed for the instrument to be designed specifically for the Washington state DOC population. The tool uses two gendered sets of four weighted models: (1) all felony, (2) violence, (3) property, and (4) drug, four for men and four for women. In this respect the tool is gender-responsive, with different models for males and females aimed at better predicting likelihood of re-offense across the four models. The current generation of risk assessment instruments (RAI) encourages gender responsiveness (VanVorrhis, Wright, Salisbury, & Bauman, 2021).

The instrument works by taking all the responses to the assessment and weighting each response dependent upon other responses. For example, if response one is yes then there will be higher weight towards the overall score for response 2, if response one is no, then response two will have a lesser weight towards the final model score. This process of weighting occurs across all four models, producing four scores. These four scores are then translated into risk levels. These risk levels are created by using cut points, thresholds that define each of the risk categories by dividing the continuous risk score into one of three levels: (1) low, (2) moderate, and (3) high risk. In 2015, the decision of where to place the cut points for each risk level was established in collaboration between the tool developer and WADOC. The decision took into consideration the then current distribution of individuals across risk levels based on the SRA2, reporting from the Counsel of State Governments in fall of 2014 on coordinating assessment cut points across states and assessments using a base rate, potential racial and ethnic breakdowns by risk level, and the allocation of department resources for community supervision going forward.

Once a risk level is calculated for each of the four models a final risk assessment is assigned based on the highest-ranking model in the hierarchy. An individual is grouped into one of six risk levels: (1) Low, (2) Moderate, (3) High Drug, (4) High Property, (5) High Violent, and (6) High Diverse. The Washington ONE is a hierarchical RAI, with violent model highest, then property model, then drug. For example, if an individual scores high on the violent model, low on the property model, and high on the drug model they will be classified as high violent (HV), even if the score on the drug model was higher. If they score low violent, moderate property, and moderate drug they will be classified as moderate (MOD). Lastly, if they score high risk across all models they will be classified as high diverse (HVPD) (Hamilton et al., 2016a).

Tool Implementation:

The Washington ONE began roll out in December 2017. Leading up to the roll-out, case management staff, to include, Classification Counselor and Community Corrections Officers, received training through the Advance Corrections Team on how to conduct interviews and complete the assessment. This training included classroom training on Assessment and Continuous Case Planning, as well as an assessment lab.

A Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plan (CSIP) was created in collaboration between WSU, WADOC, and Assessments.com, the tool software vendor. The CSIP addressed the purpose, operations, coordination, and expected outcomes of the various elements of the implementation, including the assessments, plans, and reports. It focuses on a combination of policy, procedure and practice. The Implementation Plan addressed the way in which the Comprehensive Strategy would be systematically

rolled out throughout the Department. However, there were unforeseen complications in the implementation that caused delays in a systemwide roll-out.

Previously, part of counselors' duties was updating the Criminal Conviction Record (CCR). To ensure that a thorough, accurate file review be completed, prior to implementation of the Washington ONE, the decision was made to make CCRs the responsibility of Records. The Washington ONE cannot be completed until the CCR has been reviewed and completed. Because of this decision, the roll-out of the Washington ONE caused significant delays in classification at the Reception Center. The Washington ONE became a part of the Initial Classification process; increasing the amount of time required to complete the initial classification process and creating delays at the Reception Center. At the other prison facilities, as well as those being supervised in the fields, case managers had 90 days to complete Washington ONEs for everyone on their caseloads, if they didn't already have one completed.

As a part of the project implementation plan, the project steering committee made the decision to establish a "norming period" for at least two years, during which agency operations would be managed according to a "Contact RLC." The Contact RLC would remain unchanged with the goal of having operations remain largely as they were under the former static tool. Advance Corrections established a Quality Assurance team to review Washington ONEs at random. If the QA team determined that a Washington ONE had been done incorrectly, it was reset and to be completed again, correcting the errors. This method of correcting errors allowed for creation of an updated Contact RLC.

During the norming period, WSIPP, DOC, and WSU were to study data being generated while the Washington ONE assessment tool was in use. The norming period workgroup was reconvened in January 2023 to discuss and scope policies, practices and system improvements related to ending the norming period and transitioning to utilizing Assessed RLC going forward.

Tool Evaluation and Analysis:

Evaluation and analysis of the Washington ONE has been conducted during and post tool implementation. This work has been completed by the tool development team at WSU & WSICJ, WSIPP, and internally at DOC by the Research and Data Analytics (RDA) team. Initial reports regarding the Washington ONE were conducted by WSU and the tool development team in 2016 and 2017. These included an initial pilot study of the ONE risk assessment, an assessment of inter-rater reliability, assessment of staff knowledge and perceptions of the tool and implementation, and a menu of interventions to be used in conjunction with the ONE needs assessment. The pilot study and tool development also resulted in multiple peer reviewed journal article publications and book chapters that addressed the tool design methodology, validation, and implementation as it related to fourth generation risk assessments, the risk needs responsiveness model, assessment customization.

The ONE pilot study followed the completed development of the tool in early calendar year 2016, (Hamilton et al., 2017a). This objective of the pilot was to assure the consistency of item scoring and application of risk category cut points. This was accomplished by training 45 WADOC staff to assess a random sample of 350 individuals from the prison and community setting as of January 2016. The scoring of these assessments was then compared to the overall development sample. Findings showed majority consistency between the random and development samples. The pilot study also included analysis of

racial and gender disparity across risk categories within the tool and as compared to the SRA2, finding the ONE had less disparity across racial and gender groups than the SRA2 tool.

The Inter-Rate Reliability (IRR) Assessment was conducted in late 2016 and aimed to assess the IRR for the ONE tool (Hamilton et al., 2017b). A high level of IRR means that staff are similarly scoring persons using the same tool given the same set of data. This connects to staff being well trained with use of the tool and the tool being clearly interpretable. Results from the study showed an excellent level of agreement on the ONE overall, with individual category domains falling between the ratings of good and acceptable. Overall, the tool had high levels of inter-rater reliability but could benefit from further training, quality assurance efforts, and question clarity.

As part of the implementation process, a survey was distributed to approximately 400 prison staff and case managers to gain insight regarding implementation efforts, perceptions of the RNR model, and to identify current knowledge levels of prison staff before they completed trainings of the RNR Based Case Management model. The report found that prison staff had mixed feelings about both the RNR model and implementation of a new risk assessment tool within the department (Hamilton et al., 2017c).

Following the development and pilot testing of the tool, WSU was tasked with creating a menu of interventions that connected previously evaluated DOC programs from the Evidence Based Practices Proviso (Hamilton et. al., 2015; Hamilton, et. al., 2017d), to the need domains within the ONE. The goal was to assist case managers in utilizing the need domain scoring from the ONE to inform programming decisions while an individual was incarcerated. The ONE Menu of Interventions report created a matrix of need domain scoring and programming options while also providing a programming gap analysis.

WSIPP has completed two evaluations related to the Washington ONE. The first examined community contact impacts where they looked at how community supervision caseloads had been impacted by the change from the SRA2 to the ONE and the impacts of the norming period (Knoth & Hirsch, 2020). They found minimal differences between contact requirements from the SRA2 and the fully dynamic ONE. The second report was a review of hierarchical risk assessments and an examination of ONE reassessments and their impact on risk level (Knoth & Hirsh, 2021). WSIPP found that the ONE is consistent with national standards, but its hierarchical methods are unique to Washington. Further, they found that most reassessments did not result in a change in risk level. When they did occur, it was in both direction (higher and lower risk) and across multiple domains.

Most recently the WADOC RDA team completed an analysis of ONE risk assessment levels (Saxe, et. al, 2022). This report analyzed drift, which occurs when there is a difference between an individual's contact RLC and assessed RLC over time. The contact RLC being a result of the norming period, whereby an individual's risk score level can only change under certain conditions such as new crimes or return to confinement, as opposed to potentially after every assessment. The report found that 12.8% of the field population and 17.4% of the prison population had contact RLCs that were mis-aligned from their assessed RLC. From this report's findings, the Norming Period Workgroup was re-convened to discuss the potential end to the norming period and potential impacts.

The Future of the Washington ONE:

In June 2022, Washington State Department of Corrections contracted with Dr. Zachary Hamilton, now at University of Nebraska Omaha, to conduct analyses and make updates to the Washington ONE tool, to be known as the Washington ONE v2.0. Information from the WSIPP reports, RDA RLC report, DOC stakeholder feedback, and correctional field conversations related to risk assessment and bias are being used to inform these potential changes to the tool. Planned analyses include an updated examination of racial and gender disparity in the tool, impact of post-2016 sentencing changes on criminal history scoring, and overall tool predictive validity. Proposed changes include updates to specific items, rebalancing of scoring weights, and provision of updated training to case managers and staff.

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Timeline:

