

Violence Risk Assessment Practices in Spain

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While practitioners are routinely faced with the task of assessing the risk of violence, the use of structured methods is neither mandatory nor widespread among mental health, correctional, and law enforcement professionals in Spain. That said, the dichotomous construct of *dangerousness* that had once been widely accepted by both practitioners and the judiciary has largely been replaced over the course of the 21st century by the continuous construct of *risk* (Andrés-Pueyo & Redondo-Illescas, 2007). This shift can mainly be attributed to the recognition that unstructured judgments of dangerousness produce poor levels of both predictive validity as well as inter-rater reliability (for a thorough discussion see Andrés-Pueyo & Arbach-Lucioni, 2014). The aim of the present chapter is to consider the history of this conceptual shift, including a discussion of risk assessment tools developed in Spain as well as the identification of future directions for research and practice in the country.

History of Violence Risk Assessment in Spain

Spain has a higher rate of imprisonment (160/100,000) than most other European countries (Aebi & Delgrande, 2008). In 2013, 66,765 people were in prison (National Institute of Statistics, 2013). Data available from an official report by the Spanish Home Office (2007) show an estimated prevalence of mental disorders of 46% among Spanish prisoners. Other study of 707 male prisoners report that the lifetime prevalence of mental disorder was 84.4% (76.2% substance use disorder, 45.3% anxiety disorder, 41% mood disorder and 10.7% psychotic disorder) and a 41.2% prevalence of any mental disorder in the last month (17.5% substance use disorder, 23.3% anxiety disorder, 14.9% mood disorder, and 4.2% psychotic disorder) (Vicens et al., 2011). The

article 6 of the Spanish Criminal Code established that the criminal dangerousness is the main reason for the security measures in offenders with mental illness. Furthermore, the risk of an imminent damage for oneself or others is one of the core criteria for civil commitment in mental disordered people.

The implementation of structured instruments in the violence risk assessment process has become widespread over the past 30 years in correctional, psychiatric, and legal contexts of developed countries in Europe and North America (Heilbrun, 2009; Otto & Douglas, 2010). These instruments are used to guide professionals when making decisions that have significant implications for civil liberties as well as public safety (e.g., involuntary hospitalization, therapeutic resource allocation, discharge from forensic psychiatric units, and release from correctional facilities) (Singh, Grann, & Fazel, 2011). Although, the implementation of such instruments has been comparatively slower in Spanish-speaking countries, Spain is an exception that has kept pace with developments abroad (Andrés-Pueyo & Echeburúa, 2010; Andrés-Pueyo & Redondo-Illescas, 2007; Arbach-Lucioni, 2013).

Unlike other Spanish-speaking countries, Spain has had a unique academic milieu over the past several decades that have resulted in favor of the paradigm shift from the diagnosis of dangerousness to the assessment of violence risk using structured instruments. Probably due to the great social impact of some cases that has been highlighted by the media, the public opinion in Spain has experienced a growing concern over increased rates of recidivism and has called for preventive measures to the government administrations. This concern has resulted in increased interest in new evidence-based techniques to predict the likelihood of recidivism in offenders serving their sentences incarcerated or in the community. Over the last decade an increasing

number of professionals have adopted the theoretical and technical principles of the structured professional judgment (SPJ) approach to violence risk assessment in order to address this concern.

The introduction of the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R; Hare, 1991) and the Psychopathy Checklist: Screening Version (PCL:SV; Hart, Cox, & Hare, 1995) scales was perhaps the most relevant precursor to the introduction of violence risk assessment tools in professional settings in Spain. Their introduction occurred in the late 20th century driven by the group directed by Rafael Torrubia from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and Javier Moltó and Roser Poy from the Universitat Jaume I, and their use spread mainly to prisons and forensic psychiatry units (i.e. Cuquerella, Torrubia, Subirana, Mohíno, Planchat, & Orós, 2003; Moltó, Poy, & Torrubia, 2000). The use of these scales was not common in non-forensic settings, as the groups responsible for conducting psychopathy assessments were mainly correctional and forensic psychologists and psychiatrists. As a result, the acceptance of violence risk assessment tools has also gained greater acceptance by forensic rather than non-forensic practitioners. Of note, the General Council of Psychological Societies in Spain and the Spanish Society of Legal and Forensic Psychology request to the Spanish Ministry of Justice claiming competence in violence risk assessment, a role that had previously been allocated by the Ministry exclusively to forensic psychiatrists (Santolaya Ochando & Arce Fernández, 2011).

Current Perspectives on Violence Risk Assessment in Spain

As the psychometric limitations of unstructured clinical judgments of dangerousness began to be disseminated in Spain in the mid-2000s (Andrés-Pueyo &

Redondo-Illescas, 2007; Ballesteros Reyes, Graña-Gómez, & Andreu-Rodriguez, 2006; Esbec-Rodríguez, 2003), Antonio Andrés-Pueyo and his team from the Group of Advanced Studies on Violence at the University of Barcelona (GEAV-UB) began collaborating with Drs. Stephen Hart and Ronald Roesch of Simon Fraser University. Led by Christopher Webster, the team at Simon Fraser University helped pioneer the SPJ model of violence risk assessment, and they have actively encouraged the translation and implementation of this work in the Spanish context.

The first collaboration between GEAV-UB and Simon Fraser University was the simultaneous translation and adaptation of three commonly-used risk assessment tools: the Historical, Clinical, Risk Management-20 (HCR-20; Webster, Douglas, Eaves, & Hart, 1997), the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA; Kropp, Hart, Webster, & Eaves, 1999), and the Sexual Violence Risk-20 (SVR-20; Boer, Hart, Kropp, & Webster, 1997). The first was translated as the *HCR-20: Guía para la valoración del riesgo de comportamientos violentos* (Hilterman & Andrés-Pueyo, 2005a), the second as the *S.A.R.A. Manual para la valoración del riesgo de violencia contra la pareja* (Andrés-Pueyo & López-Ferré, 2005), and the third as the *SVR-20: Manual de Valoración del Riesgo de Violencia Sexual* (Hilterman & Andrés-Pueyo, 2005b).

This work was immediately followed by the investigation of the predictive validity and inter-rater reliability of these translations. The results of two studies validating the Spanish versions of these tools were published in December 2007 in the Spanish journal, *Papeles del Psicólogo*. Specifically, Arbach-Lucioni and Andrés-Pueyo (2007) prospectively examined the utility of the translated HCR-20 in a sample of civil psychiatric inpatients, whereas Redondo-Illescas and colleagues (2007) retrospectively explored the utility of the translated SVR-20 in a sample of sex

offenders in the community. The results from the validation of the Spanish version of the SARA in a forensic sample were published the following year (Andrés-Pueyo, Lopez-Ferrer, & Alvarez-Lopez, 2008).

The number of Spanish publications concerning violence risk assessment has increased as these tools have become used both in research settings and professional practice. Furthermore, government agencies from different *autonomous communities* (i.e., regional governments) within Spain have shown an interest in the implementation of risk assessment tools, thereby raising awareness and acceptance. For example, the Catalan Justice Department, the Spanish Home Office, and the Law Enforcement organization of the Basque Country have all adapted and developed violence risk assessment tools (i.e. Andrés-Pueyo, Arbach-Lucioni, & Redondo-Illescas, 2010; Echeburúa, Amor, Loinaz, & de Corral, 2010; Echeburúa, Fernández-Montalvo, & de Corral, 2009; Garrido-Antón, 2012). The following sections describe the major milestones in the development of some of these tools, including the Catalan Multi-Scale System for Violence Risk Assessment for Offenders (RisCanvi; Andrés-Pueyo et al., 2010), the Barcelona Guide for Severe Intimate Partner Violence Risk Assessment (RVD-BCN; Álvarez et al., 2011), the Scale for Predicting Severe Intimate Partner Violence-Revised (Escala revisada de predicción del riesgo de violencia grave contra la pareja or EPV-R; Echeburúa et al., 2010), and the Police Risk Assessment Guide (Valoración Policial del Riesgo or VPR; Group of Internal Security Studies, 2010).

RisCanvi

The RisCanvi, named that way in reference to the expression *change in risk* (in Catalan *canvi en el risc*), is a risk assessment tool that was introduced into the Catalan

correctional system in 2009. The instrument was developed in response to the progressive hardening of the penal law¹, the increasing number of prisoners in the region, and the release of previously violent offenders into the community which resulted in a call among both the general public and justice administrators for a change in the way offenders were assessed, classified, and managed. Consequently, the Catalan Justice Department convened a group of experts and decision-makers in 2008 to implement evidence-based measures to reduce violent recidivism, self-harm, intra-institutional incidents, and technical violations in the Catalan correctional system.

The GEAV-UB was responsible for deciding and selecting, based on the research literature and a case-control retrospective study, the risk factors to be included in the computerized RisCanvi system and to retrospectively test its predictive validity. This multi-scale system includes four specific algorithms to compute the overall level of risk for each four main criteria to predict and the orienting cut-offs to aid the correctional professionals in their final decision about the risks (Andrés-Pueyo et al., 2010). The RisCanvi comprises two formats, a brief screener – mostly actuarial - comprised of 10 risk factors used with all offenders and this format gives a two level of risk (low and high). Also, the RisCanvi includes a full and comprehensive assessment of 43 risk factors used with offenders judged to be at medium or high risk by the screener or with offenders who are undergoing a significant transition. This full assessment is

¹ Spain is among the European countries with higher prison rates, paradoxically its violent crime rates are the lowest in Europe. This paradox is often attributed to a culture of "zero tolerance" whose main result has been what the criminologist S. Redondo-Illescas (2007) called "normative inflation", it means the establishment of more punishment and more severe penalties.

guided by the SPJ orientations. Each risk factor is weighted differently depending on the four outcome of interest (i.e., violent recidivism, self-harm, intra-institutional incidents, and technical violations). Total scores on the full version of the RisCanvi are used to produce a first actuarial estimation of recidivism risk associated with one of three risk categories (low, medium, high). The professional who is in charge of this individual risk assessment can change or overrated always this risk level, although justification for this change is required in writing.

The RisCanvi has been found to produce excellent levels of predictive validity for intra-institutional violent infractions ($AUC = .82$, $SE = .02$, $p < .01$) (Arbach-Lucioni, Martínez-García, & Andrés-Pueyo, 2012). The findings of studies examining the predictive validity of the RisCanvi for its other outcomes of interest will be available shortly (Capdevila-Capdevila & Ferrer-Puig, in press). The RisCanvi's systematic evaluation of risk factors for different outcome criteria has also led to a better understanding of the differences in risk profiles between specific populations such as Spanish nationals versus immigrants (Arbach-Lucioni, Redondo-Illescas, Singh, & Andrés-Pueyo, 2014).

The use of the RisCanvi is now mandatory for assessing all offenders entering the Catalanian correctional system as well as for the re-assessment of inmates over time. It includes a detailed user manual and training in the system's use is provided regularly by the Center for Legal Studies and Specialized Training of the Catalan Government ([Centre d'Estudis Jurídics i Formació Especialitzada de la Generalitat de Catalunya](#)) to users (psychologists, criminologists, social workers and psychiatrists). Because the system is computerized, the Justice Department provides data on an annual basis to the GEAV-UB, which then analyzes its predictive validity and inter-rater

reliability with the aim of adjusting cut-offs thresholds and actuarial estimates. The first version of RisCanvi was revised and calibrated in 2011 after two years of implementation.

RVD-BCN

The autonomous communities of Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Madrid were also pioneers in the development of protocols for the assessment of intimate partner violence risk. A project recently carried out in Catalonia resulted in the development of the RVD-BCN, in Catalan *Risc de Violència vers la Dona-Barcelona*, referring to the risk of violence against women. The instrument was developed between 2008 and 2009 through an initiative of the Barcelona Network Against Gender Violence (*Circuit Barcelona contra la Violència vers les Dones*, or *CIRCUIT* in Catalan). The CIRCUIT consists in a network of all institutions in the city of Barcelona involved in addressing violence against women (e.g. health, police, social, legal and educational services, including non-governmental organizations). The RVD-BCN is an SPJ tool for assessing the risk of severe physical violence by intimate partners, and was designed to aid in interventions with victims attending to any of the facilities in the CIRCUIT. The instrument is composed of 16 risk factors measuring five domains: history of violence, severe threats and aggressions against the partner, aggravating circumstances, the partner's vulnerability and risk perception. Each risk factor is coded dichotomously (presence or absence), and based on the sum of risk factors present, the victim is classified as being in a situation of low, medium, or high risk.

The RVD-BCN was prospectively validated between 2009 and 2010 in a sample of 216 women attending to any of the CIRCUIT facilities. Mean total scores was

significantly correlated with physical violence at three ($r(208) = .19, p = .02$) and six ($r(202) = .22, p = .01$) months. The instrument demonstrated good levels of internal consistency ($\alpha = .71$) and predictive validity for the most severe forms of physical violence during the six-month follow-up ($AUC = .72, SE = .06, p < 0.01$), suggesting that the tool may be useful in the assessment and short-term management of this type of violence (Arbach-Lucioni & Andrés-Pueyo, 2014). Both the user manual and the scale itself have been registered under a Creative Commons license so as to allow free use (<http://goo.gl/kS6rHV>).

EPV-R

Echeburúa and colleagues (Echeburúa, Fernández-Montalvo, De Corral, & López-Goñi, 2009) constructed the *Escala de Predicción del Riesgo de Violencia Grave contra la Pareja (Prediction Scale of Risk of Serious Violence Against Intimate Partner)*— also known as the EPV – at the University of the Basque Country for the purposes of assessing the risk of intimate partner homicide in complainants to the police in the region. The instrument was developed to enable professionals including forensic psychologists, judges, law enforcement officers, social workers, and so on to remain informed about what protective measures are required to meet the specific needs of victims. A revised version, the EPV-R, was made to facilitate its psychometric properties and practical usefulness by police personnel (Echeburúa, Fernández-Montalvo, De Corral et al., 2009). It consists of 20 items selected for their high statistical relationship with intimate partner serious violence. The instrument measures risk across five domains: personal data, relationship type, violence type, aggressor profile, and victim's vulnerability. Total scores are used to classify risk of victimization

as being low, moderate, or high (Echeburúa, Fernández-Montalvo, & de Corral, 2009). The scale has demonstrated in retrospective studies good levels of internal consistency ($\alpha = .71$) and inter-rater reliability ($r = .73, p < .001$) (Echeburúa et al., 2010). Although the EPV-R is currently being used by police officers in the Basque Country, there are no currently published prospective studies investigating the relationship between EPV-R assessments and future intimate partner violence.

VPR and VPER

The Spanish government developed the *Valoración Policial del Riesgo*, or Police Risk Assessment Guide for use by national and local law enforcement agencies in addressing intimate partner violence around the country. After a survey of the practical utility of the SARA and a related SPJ instrument, the Brief Spousal Assault Form for the Evaluation of Risk (B-SAFER; Kropp, Hart, & Belfrage, 2005), in police units from Cantabria and Asturias between late 2006 and early 2007, there was a perceived need for a new instrument adapted to the needs and resources of local security forces working with victims (Garrido Antón, 2012; p. 97). The answer was a new protocol and computerized VPR system, which consists, in brief, on a 16 risk factors guide rated on a six-point scale each risk factor according to intensity and weighted according to its empirical association with future intimate partner violence risk against the women. The factor structure of the VPR has four dimensions: psychological characteristics, violence, maladjusted behavior and compliance with the law. Once completed, the VPR offers a catalog of police strategies of interventions designed to protect and prevent the victims. Garrido Antón (2012) established good levels of

internal consistency for the VPR in a sample of 20,824 intimate partner violence victims ($\alpha = .86$).

The VPR has a complementary guide called the *Valoración Policial de la Evolución del Riesgo* (VPER), or *Police Assessment of Risk Evolution*. This ancillary instrument is comprised of 17 items that aim to re-assess continuously intimate partner violence risk to examine whether there have been significant changes in risk level following the initial VPR assessment. Both the VPR and VPER offer the administering practitioner the option of adjusting the level of risk suggested by the computerized system, although this decision requires justification (Garrido Antón, 2012).

There are currently no published findings on the predictive validity in full of either the VPR or VPER, although preliminary results from a recent report suggest that VPR assessments produce poor levels of predictive validity ($AUC = .58$, 95% CI [.49, .67], SE and p value unreported), with risk levels being routinely underestimated. It has been suggested that this underestimation may be due to methodological and/or implementation-related issues. Further research is needed to calibrate the scoring algorithms, cut-offs and their weights for local populations. In addition, police staff may need more training on the effective use of these instruments, especially how to code items using victim information (López Ossorio, 2014).

Juvenile Violence Risk Assessment Tools

The Spanish juvenile justice system has also benefited from the adaptation of risk assessment tools for use with violent young offenders. Two examples of such instruments are the introduction of the Spanish translation of Hoge and Andrews' (2003) Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (IGI-J; Garrido-Genovés,

López-Martín, & Silva do Rosario, 2004) in Madrid (Graña-Gómez, Garrido-Genovés, & Cieza-González, 2007), as well as the adaptation by the Catalan government of the Structured Assessment for Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY; Borum, Bartel, & Forth, 2000) for use in its own juvenile justice system (Vallès-Port & Hilterman, 2006). In addition, two instruments designed to assist in the detection of antisocial personality and psychopathy precursors in juvenile offenders have been translated and adapted for use with Spanish youths, namely the Antisocial Process Screening Device (APSD; Frick & Hare, 2001; Spanish adaptation by González, Molinuevo, Pardo, & Torrubia, 2003) and the Hare Psychopathy Checklist: Youth Version (PCL:YV; Borum et al., 2000; Spanish adaptation by Graña-Gómez, Garrido-Genovés, & González-Cieza, 2011).

A recent study examined the predictive validity and inter-rater reliability of the SAVRY, YLS/CMI, and PCL:YV in a one-year follow-up of 105 Spanish adolescents with a community sanction (Hilterman, Nicholls, & van Nieuwenhuizen, 2014). All three instruments produced excellent levels of predictive validity when used to evaluate the likelihood of self-reported violent recidivism (AUC range = 0.72 to 0.75). The SAVRY was found to produce higher levels of inter-rater reliability (ICC = .79, *SE* = unreported) than the YLS/CMI (ICC = .51, *SE* = unreported) and PCL:YV (ICC = .63, *SE* = unreported). This is the first study in Spain in which the predictive validity of these three risk measures has been tested in relation to future recidivism. Its methodological rigor has provided a useful model for future research in the field.

The IRiS Study in Spain

Within the framework of the International Risk Survey (IRiS) project led by Jay P. Singh in 2012, the first national survey regarding the use and perceived utility of

violence risk assessment tools by professionals in the correctional and mental health systems was conducted in Spain. Invitations to participate were electronically distributed through online directories of 13 national professional organizations (Box 1). Respondents included 35 psychologists and 5 professionals from other disciplines in the area of mental health who had conducted at least one violence risk assessment in Spain for at least the last 12 months prior to receiving the survey. The mean age of respondents was 42 years ($SD = 10.1$) and they had an average of 14 years ($SD = 9.2$) of experience.

[Start Box 1]

[End Box 1]

The average number of violence risk assessments made by respondents was 320 ($SD = 899$) in their lifetime and 35 ($SD = 90$) in the past year. The standard deviations of the means showed considerable variability in the practice of risk assessment among professionals, suggesting that a select group of professionals are conducting most such assessments in Spain. On average, 68-70% of assessments in the past year were carried out with the help of structured tools. In an average of 57% of assessments ($SD = 35\%$), professionals did not know the outcome that followed the risk assessment they carried out. In other words, they had no criterion with which to compare their predictions. Again, the wide dispersion of this estimate indicates that there is no prescribed practice that ensures professionals can compare their predictions with an objective measure.

The PCL-R, the PCL:SV, and the HCR-20 topped the list of the most commonly used tools in Spain for the purposes of risk assessment, both by personal preference as

well as by institutional requirement. Between 40% (for PCL:SV and HCR-20) and 45% (for PCL-R) of respondents ($n = 16, 16$ and 18 , respectively) had used them in the past year. The survey also explored professionals' views regarding the usefulness of these tools for risk assessment, management, and monitoring (see Table 1). Interestingly, the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R; Andrews & Bonta, 1995) was the instrument perceived by professionals to be the most useful for all three tasks, despite the fact that it was designed to predict general recidivism risk rather than violent recidivism risk, and its use is not routinely requested by Spanish institutions. This finding may be important, as the LSI-R contains dynamic risk factors designed to identify treatment targets and responsivity characteristics, both of which have apparent importance to practitioners in the country. The Violence Risk Appraisal Guide (VRAG; Harris, Rice, & Quinsey, 1993) and Classification of Violence Risk (COVR; Monahan et al., 2005) were also legally or institutionally required for select facilities, although these are initiatives of specific institutions rather than blanket regulations. In fact, there are no regional or national level regulations at this time that indicate which specific instruments should (or should not) be used for the purposes of violence risk assessment.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

As with perceived usefulness, cost information could also help institutions and professionals in Spain to choose which instruments to adopt. In the IRiS, unstructured clinical judgments were found to be more expensive but less time consuming (on average, five hours and €117 per unstructured assessment versus 10 hours and €81 for each structured assessment). Given the lower cost of structured assessments, coupled

with their greater accuracy and reliability in predicting violence (Ægisdóttir, White, Spengler, Maugherman, Anderson, & Cook, 2006), administrators and decision-makers should be aware of the respective costs and benefits of both methods. It would also be useful to examine whether the time required to administer structured assessments could be reduced through adequate training.

Future Directions for Violence Risk Assessment in Spain

The results of the above mentioned survey indicate that professionals in Spain have a positive attitude towards adopting new evidence-based instruments for the purposes of violence risk assessment, management, and monitoring. However, our experience over the last decade has shown that the process of integrating this technology into standard working practices often meets with some resistance, usually due to both an extreme reliance on unstructured clinical practices and organizational cultures. In addition, some instruments undermine professional trust by being implemented without proper prospective testing of their predictive validity, thus impacting negatively on their general acceptance.

Hence, there are several tasks for the future of this professional practice in Spain: (1) strengthen the evidence-base on the psychometric properties of risk assessment systems currently in use throughout the country with specific populations (e.g., women, youth, mentally disordered offenders); (2) establish institutional “best practice” guidelines for institutions to help regulating the professional practice of risk assessment; and (3) encourage mental health, correctional, law enforcement, and justice professionals to support the inclusion of evidence-based practices for violence risk assessment, management, and monitoring in institutions. Spanish researchers also need

to ensure that the advances they make in the field of risk assessment achieve a greater presence in the international literature.

The trend in legal statutes and institutional policies is clear, especially in those regions of Spain that have pioneered the introduction of violence risk assessment tools. Although the economic crisis that has affected the country since 2008 has likely slowed investment in and development of risk assessment technologies, it seems clear that the academic consensus has been accepted and promoted by a number of government agencies over the last decade will continue to guide efforts in preventing violence throughout the nation.

Conclusion

Practitioners and researchers in Spain have kept up to date with international developments in violence risk assessment for mental health, correctional, law enforcement, and judicial professionals. For more than a decade, whether as a result of personal or government initiatives, new techniques have been developed, adapted, and validated as the focus on diagnosing dangerousness has largely shifted to that of assessing violence risk (Andrés-Pueyo & Echeburúa, 2010).

The aforementioned IRiS project was the first to present information on the practice of violence risk assessment in Spain. Although no common guidelines in relation to violence risk assessment have been agreed upon by professional associations in the country, most respondents reported using the same tools that are used by professionals from other countries in which the application of these techniques is more widespread (Singh et al., 2014). These results can help administrators and decision-makers when it comes to selecting the most appropriate instruments for assessing,

managing, and monitoring the risk of future violence. Furthermore, the results highlight the need for routine training to ensure we achieve an optimal balance between public safety and respect for individual freedoms.

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