

The Actuarial Prediction of Sexual Reoffending – policy addendum

Introduction

HMPPS recognises that sexual offending causes enormous harm to victims. This harm can have implications for the victim's whole life. We are committed to doing everything within our control to reduce the likelihood of reoffending amongst those in prison or under our supervision. We do this through assessing people convicted of sexual offences, managing the risks they pose to the public and supporting their rehabilitation.

It is important that our risk assessments are based on up-to-date research evidence as set out in the research papers. We therefore review our assessment tools to ensure they work as effectively as possible. The changes we are making to the OASys Sexual reoffending Predictor (OSP) are the result of the process. The changes will support staff to accurately assess the risk of reconviction which will inform the measures they put in place to protect the public.

Summary

What is changing?

The way that we assess the percentage likelihood of someone committing a further sexual offence that results in conviction. We will start calculating the scores for those who have committed offences like online grooming in the same way as those who have committed offences involving indecent images of children. Currently we calculate the scores for them in the same way as we calculate scores for offences like rape and indecent assault.

Why are we making the change?

New evidence has shown that, by making these changes, the tool will produce more accurate scores for predicting the different types of sexual reoffending.

When are we making the change?

As soon as the report is published, we will begin our communications plan to make sure that all practitioners and other stakeholders are informed about the changes before they go live. We have already started the process to make the digital changes, to ensure these are ready to go live when we need them to. We anticipate that this work will be complete within 10 weeks of publication.

HMPPS assessment process

Probation practitioners need to be able to undertake a thorough and informed risk assessment to enable them to develop a robust risk management plan. Our assessment process involves the use of Actuarial Risk Assessment Instruments (ARAI) such as the OSP, combined with structured professional judgement, to ensure a full assessment that is accurate and responsive to change in a person's individual circumstances. For this reason, OSP is important in our work, but is only part of the risk assessment process used by HMPPS to assess those convicted of sexual offences and it does not automatically determine the level of risk at which someone is managed. This 4 step process is outlined in the HMPPS Risk of Serious Harm guidance to be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmppps-risk-of-serious-harm-guidance-2020>

Most individuals convicted of sexual offences are subject to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). Under MAPPA, the police, probation service and a range of other agencies work closely together to manage the risks they pose to protect the public.

Background to OSP

HMPPS introduced OSP to assess the risk of further sexual offending in 2021. It had advantages over the previous ARAI in that it distinguished between the risk of further offences which involved contact, and those which related to accessing indecent images. We reviewed it relatively quickly following its implementation to make sure it was working as intended and, given that we now have more information about offending patterns as described in the research reports, we are able to update it based on that information.

The review of OSP found that it predicts well for those people likely to go on to commit direct contact offences such as rape and sexual assault. It has also been effective in identifying those people who are at higher risk of going on to commit offences related to indecent images of children. In the light of our findings, we will now update it to improve how it predicts indirect contact reoffending, for example, offences which involve on-line grooming of children. This will strengthen the prediction of reoffending.

HMPPS response to the analysis

In line with HMPPS's commitment to working in a manner that best protects the public by drawing on the most recent research developments, and taking opportunities to monitor and evaluate our risk assessment tools, this timely review identified the need for the changes we are now making.

We have worked closely with MOJ analysts during the conduct of this research and have considered carefully how to respond to it. With their advice, HMPPS has decided to introduce:

- a revised version of OSP/C, which will be called OSP/DC, or OASys Sexual reoffending Predictor/Direct Contact. This will predict likelihood of direct contact sexual offending against adults and children.
- a revised version of OSP/I, which will be called OSP/IIC or OASys Sexual reoffending Predictor/Images and Indirect Contact. This will predict likelihood of reoffending for offences related to indecent images of children plus indirect contact offending against children.

In making this decision we weighed up:

- The original findings in relation to OSP/C and OSP/I from Craik et al (2024)
- The need to keep our ARAIs up to date, and consistent with the latest research, changes to reoffending patterns and changes in legislation.
- The need for clarity, ensuring we have a suite of ARAIs that are accessible for our staff, and which support rather than overcomplicate the assessment process.
- The potential impact on people in prisons and on probation.
- Impact on demand for services.

The proposed changes impact on the first step of the overall risk assessment process. All other risk-related information about the individual will be considered in the same way as it is now to inform the overall level of risk of the person, and the measures put in place to manage those risks.

Implementing the revised predictors

Following publication of the research reports we will implement the revised versions of OSP. This work includes:

- Informing practitioners and supplying guidance on what the changes mean for how they assess relevant individuals and what they need to do as a result of the changes.
- Providing information for people in prison or subject to supervision to explain the changes.
- Introducing revised versions of the OSP predictors into our electronic systems.
- Working with partner organisations to ensure they are aware of the changes.

Given that OSP effectively discriminates between those at higher and lower risk of direct contact offending such as rape and sexual assault, and indecent images reoffending, and is only one part of the overall assessment process, we are satisfied that it is right for practitioners to continue using existing versions of OSP prior to publication of the research, and for a short period of time afterwards whilst we make the changes to improve how it works for those convicted of indirect contact offences. We will use this short period of time to enable effective implementation of the new tool and make the necessary digital changes. (While there are differences between predicted rates of proven reoffending and the actual rates found in the research, these do not compromise HMPPS's practice of managing offenders within Low, Medium, High and Very High risk bands; these differences will be eliminated when the new tool is implemented).

Practitioners develop a detailed plan based on the overall risk assessment to manage any risk identified and any safety planning necessary and will work with other agencies to deliver the plan. We will now communicate the changes effectively so all stakeholders understand them, and practitioners know how to calculate the new scores and how they

should use them in the risk assessment process. We will also provide clear guidance to staff about the arrangements for reviewing individual assessments. We anticipate the new versions of OSP will be in place within 10 weeks of the publication of the report to allow for the complex digital changes to be made and to make sure we have time to communicate the scoring changes to staff. Not doing this properly and thoroughly risks effective implementation of the changes.

Conclusion

The changes mean that we will continue to have a tool that effectively predicts direct contact offences as well as indecent image offences but that also better predicts the likelihood of indirect contact offending against children. This will ensure we provide our staff with the tools they need to predict different types of sexual offending, including newer indirect contact offences.

By carrying out this revalidation we have been able to identify and respond to changing patterns of offending and update OSP accordingly. This ensures we equip our staff with the most up to date assessment tools, and thus improve our ability to protect the public from repeat sexual offending.