

## Optimizing Case Conceptualization of Sex Offender Needs: The Utility of Behavioural Crime Scene Analysis

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Researchers at the Criminal Investigative Research & Analysis Group (CiR&A) have been working on various methods to analyze crime scene behaviours to aid forensic clinicians with case conceptualization of sex offenders' needs. Analysis of crime scene behaviours is unstandardized and sporadically used in assessments. However, crime scene behaviours can often be identified to infer an offender's *motivation*—important in assessing criminogenic needs (i.e., risk-need-responsivity model; R-N-R) for offender treatment. Connecting clinicians with research from criminal investigative psychology will aid in their understanding of offenders' motivations through their crime scene behaviours. A framework for behavioural crime scene analysis (BCSA) in sexual offending using risk factors can be of specific help.

Clinicians adherent to R-N-R principles assess evidence to formulate an offender's criminogenic needs when planning treatment goals. Understanding the underlying causes of sexual offending is difficult, as multi-determined, complex behaviours inherent in sexual offences create a myriad of potential causal factors. Presently, forensic assessment is an intricate process, including dynamic risk management composing of clinical interview and/or structured (actuarial) clinical judgment tools (e.g., Static-99). While clinicians may read police reports to gain a sense of the offender, crime scene behaviours are rarely a required component of case conceptualization. It is our view that a clinician's conceptualization and formulation of treatment needs will be enhanced by a detailed analysis of *what* the offender actually did in his crime and inferences as to *why* he went about doing it in that particular manner.

BCSA is a two-step investigative tool typically reserved for violent crimes. In the first step, information is collected in order to reconstruct the offence; primary sources include crime scene photographs, police reports, and victim statements. Next, decisions are made as to what behaviours are necessary and sufficient to represent the offence and understand the offender. This step is highly variable, as relevance of behaviours is contextual. For instance knowing that the victim did not fight back *and* finding several bruises and cuts on the victim may lead to the interpretation that the offender was abnormally hostile. From an investigative perspective, BCSA is the basis for much of the behavioural investigative advice offered by experts, such as suspect prioritization, serial offender linkage analysis, and threat assessment. Recently, BCSA emerged in sexual recidivism literature, signaling its potential clinical utility (see Lehmann, Goodwill, Gallasch-Nemitz, Biedermann, & Dahle, 2013).

A critical step in BCSA is deciding which behaviours to focus on which calls for the use of a risk factor framework. Mann, Hanson, and Thornton (2010) review psychologically meaningful risk factors that have both a plausible rationale to cause sexual offending and are strongly supported by empirical findings. It is our view that some of the more prominent risk factors may be discernible from BCSA, such as criminal versatility, hostility/grievance, need for intimacy, impulsivity, and sexual deviance. While assessments for sexual deviance (e.g., pedophilia, sadism) usually refer to crime scene behaviours for evidence, the assessment of other risk factors, such as need for intimacy, are usually derived from self-report. An offender's need for intimacy refers to a lack of stable intimate relationships, poor social skills, and feelings of isolation. Behaviourally this could be evidenced in a crime by negative affect, complimenting the victim, engaging in foreplay, kissing, and/or erectile dysfunction. While this information may be collected through self-report, it is difficult to imagine a better source of relevant information than including objective behavioural details from the offence that caused the individual to present for treatment.

Not only can BCSA buttress assessment tools, it can also indicate when case conceptualization is incomplete. For example, police investigators may traditionally describe crime scenes as organized or disorganized. In clinical terms, this likely captures an offender's overall impulsivity or level of behavioural regulation. Indeed, clinicians evaluating whether an offender was criminally responsible may address behavioural "disorganization", yet, BCSA may reveal additional and even contrary evidence related to impulsivity (e.g., evidence of prior planning) relevant for any assessment. Alternatively, a first-time sex offender may score low on scales of criminal versatility based on his official record, but an analysis of the index offence reveals a number of indicators of criminal versatility (e.g., con approach, bringing a weapon, stealing from the victim, awareness of police procedures). These indicators of criminal versatility might otherwise be overlooked in a seemingly comprehensive assessment. Therefore, the addition and synthesis of BCSA methods to standard sexual offender assessment methods may provide the clinician with additional confirmatory or contradictory evidence to increase the validity of their case conceptualization and formulation of the offender, improving treatment efficacy.

BCSA should not replace current clinical methods for assessing sexual offenders; rather, it may enhance the capability of clinicians to correctly formulate an offender's needs. As sexual offences are complex multi-determined phenomenon, good clinical practice should require a standardized, multi-method approach to assess treatment needs. The authors are currently working on projects aimed at increasing standardization in BCSA. One such project directly useful to treatment is the creation of a tool to identify prominent sex offender risk factors through BCSA. While this tool will further improve BCSA efforts, we urge clinicians to always evaluate behavioural offence details where available to ground their conceptualization of an offender's needs in relation to their actual (read, not self-reported) behaviours. For further research on BCSA efforts in Canada, visit the CiR&A webpage ([www.criminvestresearch.com](http://www.criminvestresearch.com)).

### Resources

- Lehmann, R. J. B., Goodwill, A. M., Gallasch-Nemitz, F., Biedermann, J., & Dahle, K-P. (2013). Applying crime scene analysis to the prediction of sexual recidivism in stranger rapes. *Law & Human Behavior*, 37, 241-254. doi:10.1037/lhb0000015
- Mann, R. E., Hanson, R. K., & Thornton, D. (2010). Assessing risk for sexual recidivism: Some proposals on the nature of psychologically meaningful risk factors. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 22, 191-217. doi:10.1177/1079063210366039