

STATUS REPORT: SCORING PROCEDURES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....1

SCORING PROCEDURES1

 Question 36: “Do you feel that the scoring procedures in the assessment forms give an accurate picture of the risk status of your clients?”2

 Question 36a: “If you answered No or Unsure, please provide suggestions for improved scoring guidelines.”3

 Question 37: “How would you describe the indicators of a successful outcome for a typical offender at their sixth month reassessment?”4

 Question 38: “What are the primary indicators in a reassessment that an offender is headed toward failure?”4

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....5

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Suggestions for Improved Scoring Guidelines3

Table 2. Indicators of “ Successful Outcome” at Sixth Month Reassessment4

Table 3. Indicators of Failure at Sixth Month Reassessment.....4

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Q 36 Do You Feel That the Scoring procedures for the Assessment Forms Give an Accurate Picture of the Risk Status of Your Clients? 2

INTRODUCTION

This fifth status report focuses on the sections of the survey that address Probation/Parole Officers opinions regarding the scoring procedures and measuring devices utilized in the current Risk Needs

Assessment instrument. One of the primary objectives for the analysis of this portion of the survey is to provide data that will complement the validation of the RNA currently being conducted by ISR.

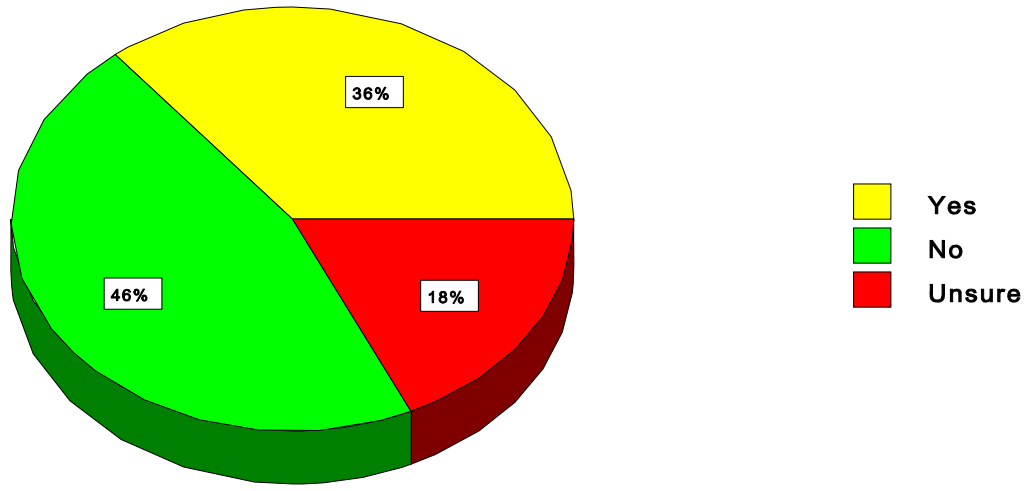
The survey was constructed to address the overall relevance, usefulness and appropriateness of the RNA instrument and its implementation. Survey results will provide an enhanced understanding of the manner in which the instrument is used by officers in Probation and Parole. These strategies will then be assessed in relation to the ultimate goals of enhancing community protection and supervision of offenders and productive use of Corrections Department resources. Assessment of Risk and Needs is essential to carrying out the responsibilities of offender monitoring and service provision and there may be various ways in which the use of the current RNA contributes to or detracts from effectiveness in these areas. Assessing the instrument's reliability and validity in terms of determining supervision classifications and offender management may highlight inconsistencies in the implementation of the tools and ultimately inform policy decisions regarding revisions to the current instrument or consolidation of paperwork in general.

SCORING PROCEDURES

Question 36: “Do you feel that the scoring procedures in the assessment forms give an accurate picture of the risk status of your clients?”

Forty-six percent of respondents tell us “*No*” they do not feel the scoring procedures reflect an accurate assessment of risk status while 36% feel that, “*Yes*” the scoring procedures do provide an accurate picture of risk. The remaining 18% of PPOs state that they are “*Unsure*” about the accuracy of the scoring procedures. Just over half of the Regular Supervision officers answering this question told us that they feel the scoring procedures provide an accurate picture of the risk status of their clients while 31% of Regular Supervision officers do not feel the scoring procedures provide an accurate picture. The instruction accompanying this section of the survey told Intensive Supervision officers not to respond because all clients in their program are considered maximum risk, but those ISP officers who did answer told us almost unanimously that the scoring procedures are not accurate. Community Corrections officers were roughly equally divided in their perception of the accuracy of the form's scoring. Many Drug Court officers indicated in earlier sections of the questionnaire that they do not use the RNA instrument and most of them did not answer this question. These results indicate that the form's usefulness is limited to Regular Supervision populations and possibly Community Corrections, whereas the rest of the PPD program officers find the scoring system inaccurate. With nearly 50% of all officers of the opinion that the scoring procedures are inaccurate it will be important to look closely at the improved scoring guidelines they suggest in the follow-up questions.

**Q 36 Do You Feel the Scoring Procedures for the Assessment Forms Gives
An Accurate Picture of the Risk Status of Your Clients?**



Question 36a: “If you answered No or Unsure, please provide suggestions for improved scoring guidelines.”

The largest proportion of PPOs tell the evaluation team that scoring procedures would benefit from *Increased Specificity and Clarified Guidelines* (17%). Another 15% of officers respond that there should be *Higher Scores for Drugs and Alcohol and More Information on Habits*. An almost equal percentage (14%) state that there should be *More Flexibility in the Assaultive Offense Scores* category or that the category should *Repeat on Reassessment* form. Eleven percent of officers answer there should be *Higher Scores for Past Probation and Parole/ Categories for Measuring Criminal History*. The remaining categories encompass feedback that indicates that the scoring guidelines are not considered very effective in terms of offender assessment or that the form should be shortened, revised or eliminated altogether. Again, officers told us that there should be a category for sex offenders, possibly to replace the information on sexual behavior. They also stated that many of the categories may not elicit reliable information because they are self-report oriented and offenders may embellish their answers to look good to PPOs. Officers also noted that there should be more room within the scoring to incorporate the PPOs impression of the client, client’s attitude and other significant factors. These answers reflect the areas of the Risk Needs Assessment instrument which have been noted as problematic throughout the survey. Numerous Drug Court and Intensive Supervision officers noted that the scoring guidelines are not applicable in their programs and 23 officers chose not to answer this question even though they did not have a positive impression of the scoring guidelines. The remaining two questions in this section of the survey regarding indicators of offender success and failure may provide further useful information in terms of what additional information could be added or deleted in the scoring sections to increase the relevance of the assessment and reassessment forms.

Q 36 a Suggestions for Improved Scoring Guidelines

Q 36 a Suggestions for Improved Scoring Guidelines		
	Frequency (65)	Percent
Increased Specificity and Clarified Guidelines	11	17%
Higher Scores for Drugs and Alcohol and More Information on Habits	10	15%
More Flexibility in Assaultive Offense Scores/ Repeat Category on Reassessment	9	14%
Higher Score for Past Probation and Parole/ More Criminal History Measures	7	11%
Reassessment Form- Not Good Mechanism for Showing Changes Over Time.	5	8%
Condense Form/ Eliminate RNA	5	8%
Sex Offenders Category- High Points/ Sexual Behavior Information not Useful	4	6%
Questionable Accuracy of Self Report	4	6%
Not Applicable in Drug Court	3	4.5%
Officer Input and Override	3	4.5%
Client Attitude/ Current Behavior	2	3%
Mental Ability, Emotional Stability and Health -Unclear or Inappropriate	2	3%

Table 1

Question 37: “How would you describe the indicators of a successful outcome for a typical offender at their sixth month reassessment?”

Almost 30% of officers tell the evaluation team that *Compliance with Conditions/ No New Arrests or Violations and Paying Costs* is an important indicator of offender success. Another 23% of officers state that *Continued Employment and Education* are important indicators of success while 18% respond that *Decreased Substance Use/ Clean UA’s* contribute to successful outcomes. Ten percent of PPOs answering this question say that *Completing Goals & Progress in the Treatment Plan* usually indicate successful outcomes and an almost equal percentage (9%) of officers state that *Regular Attendance or Completion of Treatment and Counseling* contributes to offender success. The category of *Decreased Substance Use/ Clean UA’s* reflects officers’ opinions in question 36a that scores for drug and alcohol abuse should receive more weight in the scoring guidelines. The most frequently cited category of *Compliance with Conditions / No New Arrests or Violations and Paying Costs* also reflects officer response in 36a that *Past Probation and Parole* and *Criminal History* should receive more emphasis in the scoring guidelines. Questions 37 and 38 in this section of the survey were used to confirm and validate responses we received to questions 34 and 35 which were very similar in nature. In reviewing the answers to 34, we can see that the top three indicators of success cited by officers were: 1) decreased drug or alcohol use 2) continued employment and 3) compliance with imposed conditions and client attitude. The three most frequently cited categories then remain the same for both questions regarding indicators of success although their prioritization differs. Thirty-one officers did not respond to this question, 19 of whom consider themselves exempt from this section of the survey because they work with either Drug Court or Intensive Supervision populations.

Q 37 Indicators of a “Successful Outcome” at Sixth Month Reassessment		
	Frequency (322)	Percent
Compliance with Conditions/ No Arrests or Violations and Paying Costs	89	28%

Q 37 Indicators of a “Successful Outcome” at Sixth Month Reassessment		
Continued Employment and Education	73	23%
Decreased Substance Abuse/ Clean UA’s	58	18%
Completing Goals & Progress in the Treatment Plan	31	10%
Regular Attendance or Completion of Treatment and Counseling	30	9%
Residential Stability	14	4%
Quality of Relationships	14	4%
Attitude/ Response to Setbacks/ Encouragement of PPO	9	3%
Use of Community Resources	4	1%

Table 2

Question 38: “What are the primary indicators in a reassessment that an offender is headed toward failure?”

When we asked officers to tell us about the primary indicators of offender failure at the six-month reassessment, 26% stated that *Non-compliance with Conditions, New Arrests or Violations and Not Paying Costs* was a primary indicator of offender failure. Another 23% state that *Increased or Continued Substance Abuse* is an indicator of failure and 17% tell us that *Unstable Employment or Education* leads to offender failure. These top three categories reflect the priorities given to indicators of failure in question 35 in the previous section of the survey. The importance of these factors is also confirmed in that they replicate the reporting categories for primary indicators of offender success, demonstrating that strengths and weaknesses fall along the same lines. Other factors that officers believe negatively influence offender outcomes include: *Negative Associations and Poor Quality Relationships; Non-Completion of Treatment Plan Goals; and Failure to Complete Counseling or Treatment*. The last two of these categories loosely fall under Non-Compliance with Conditions, further confirming that the best indicators of offender success may be contained in the narrative case notes which document offender behavior through the course of their supervision in greatest detail. Additional information on the factors PPOs use to evaluate offender risk and treatment or the forms they consider most useful in assisting them in doing their jobs will be reviewed in the Overview and Summary sections of the survey to be covered in subsequent status reports. Twenty eight officers did not answer this question, 15 of whom were Drug Court or ISP.

Q 38 Indicators of Failure at Sixth Month Reassessment		
	Frequency (344)	Percent
Non-compliance with Conditions/ New Arrests or Violations/Not Paying Costs	89	26%

Q 38 Indicators of Failure at Sixth Month Reassessment		
Increased or Continued Substance Abuse	78	23%
Unstable Employment or Education	60	17%
Negative Associations/ Poor Quality Relationships	27	8%
Not Completing Goals/ Not Progressing in Plan	21	6%
Non-attendance or Failure to Complete Treatment or Counseling	21	6%
Lack of Residential Stability	14	4%
Unsatisfactory Prior Performance on Probation or Parole	9	3%
Attitude/ Response to Setbacks/ Encouragement of PPO	10	3%
None on Form/ Form Not Used	6	2%
Long Criminal History/ Age at First Conviction	5	1%
Underutilization of Community Resources	4	1%

Table 3

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section of the survey focuses on ascertaining officer opinion regarding the accuracy of scoring weights and procedures and is also meant to highlight any inconsistencies in the implementation of the RNA tool which may compromise its effectiveness. The questions were created to determine the manner in which PPOs work with scoring guidelines to arrive at supervision classification and offender management strategies. Ultimately the answers obtained by the evaluation team should serve to inform any recommendations for the revision of the current instrument and general consolidation of paperwork. Forty-six percent of respondents told us that they do not believe the scoring procedures reflect an accurate picture of risk status. When broken down by type of officer, the answers indicate that the form's usefulness is limited to Regular Supervision populations and possibly Community Corrections, whereas other PPD programs find the scoring system irrelevant for the populations with which they work. The suggestions offered by officers to improve the accuracy of scoring guidelines focused on three main areas: 1) increased specificity and clarification of category parameters; 2) higher scores for drug and alcohol use and; 3) more flexibility within the assaultive offense category and repeat of this category from assessment to reassessment. Overall, officers told us that they did not consider the category guidelines to be very relevant for assessing risk and that the form should be shortened, revised or eliminated. They also state that there should be a category for sex offenders on the assessment portion of the form and that the self-reported nature of much information on the form leads to questionable accuracy. Drug Court and Intensive Supervision officers noted that the form is not useful for their programs.

In lieu of the categories represented on the RNA instrument, we asked officers to tell us which indicators they feel contribute to offender success and failure. The answers for both success and failure were similar, expressed positively, the top three answers were: 1) compliance with conditions, no new arrests or violations and payment of fines; 2) continued employment or education; and 3) decreased substance use. These responses reflect those we received to question 34 which asked about factors that contributed to offenders successfully completing the goals outlined in their case plans. When asked about the factors that contribute to offender failure, officers gave answers similar to those quoted for success, except along a deficit model: 1) non-compliance with

conditions, new arrests or violations and not paying costs; 2) increased or continued use of substances and ; 3) unstable employment or education. These answers echo those we received for question 35 on factors that prohibit offenders from successfully achieving case plan goals. Officers' answers imply that the indicators of offender success or failure are most coherently demonstrated in a narrative form which tracks offender progress in detail over time. More information on what more accurate or relevant measure of success and failure might be will be contained in analysis of subsequent sections of the survey in forthcoming status reports.