

Practitioner Perceptions on the Merits, Challenges and Ethical Dilemmas of LSI-R in Practice

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Summary: The Level of Service Inventory–Revised (LSI-R), a validated risk assessment instrument, was introduced into practice with adult offenders by the Irish Probation Service in 2004. This signalled the beginning of an unprecedented change process, which has since permeated every aspect of Irish probation work, including service delivery. Reflecting what is considered to be best practice in international probation policy and research, the Irish Probation Service has invested significant resources in introducing a new practice orientation and associated tools to ensure the delivery of high-quality assessment and supervision of offenders. A structured, standardised risk assessment and risk management approach has been adopted, which has required practitioners to shift their practice orientation from the traditional casework approach to an evidence-based one. This paper presents the findings from a study that examined practitioner perceptions of risk assessment/risk management orientation and its impact on probation practice with adult offenders. Providing an opportunity for reflection, it sought to elicit what practitioners consider to be the strengths of the new orientation as well as critical theoretical, ethical and training aspects that merit further deliberation. The study found that the transition from a model of care to one of control has raised dilemmas, tensions and conflicts for practitioners. As practice becomes more prescriptive and regulated, practitioners often find that they hold two incompatible beliefs at the same time; those from their professional social work training on one hand and those that underpin a more managerialist narrative on the other.

Keywords: Actuarial risk assessment instruments, LSI-R, the Probation Service, Probation Officer, practitioner perceptions, effectiveness, clinical judgement, quality control, training, ethical issues, audit.

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