Slide 1

Towards an Integrated Theory of Dynamic Risk, Protective Factors, and Agency

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Capital thinking. Globally minded.

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Slide 2

Papers

Aggression and Violent Behavior

ELSEVIER

The conceptualization of dynamic risk factors in child sex offenders: An agency model
Roxanne Heffernan, Tony Ward *
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

Aggression and Violent Behavior

ELSEVIER   journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/aggviobeh

A comprehensive theory of dynamic risk and protective factors
Roxanne Heffernan, Tony Ward*
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

Slide 3

Aims

- Integrated model of DRF and PF based on agency and its core components

- Represents an attempt to provide greater detail – explanatory depth

- Unpack DRF and PF into their causal, contextual, and experiential elements

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Background: DRF & PF

- Statistical predictors: static/dynamic, stable/acute

- Criminogenic needs (Andrews & Bonta, 2010)

- "Psychologically meaningful" (Mann, Hanson & Thornton, 2010)

- Protective/promotive factors, strengths

- A "theoretical dead end" (Ward & Beech, 2015)

- Dynamic Risk Research Framework (Ward & Fortune, 2016b)

Slide 5

Theoretical Problems

- Descriptive/predictive, and not explanatory/causal

- Composite constructs, incoherent

- Lack specificity/reference

- Normative rather than scientific kinds

- Have dual status (i.e., DRF or PF)

- Suffer from the "grain problem"

Slide 6

Example: "Intimacy Deficits"

Lack of emotionally intimate relationships with adults, no stable partner relationship (current/history), conflict and infidelity, social isolation, offending*

Emotional congruence with children

Lacks capacity/desire for intimacy with adults

Lack of concern for others

Sexual deviance, i.e., paraphilia, paedophilia

Offence-supportive beliefs

Hostility towards women

Interpersonal skill deficits

Sexual pre-occupation, sexualised coping

Attachment problems

Arousal systems   Self-regulatory systems   Emotional systems   Mental representation

Example continued:

- Culture/context: *Norms specifying the types of relationship appropriate and what these should involve, opportunities for connection*
- Interpersonal/social: *Interpersonal style, social learning, communication, support/advice, social roles*
- Phenomenological: *emotional connection, preferences, beliefs, perspective-taking, attachment*
- Neuropsychological: *brain regions/neurotransmitters, i.e., oxytocin, vasopressin, pre-frontal cortex, hormones*
- Biological: *physical arousal, health, physical attributes*

Does it matter?

- If we know that they are predictive does it matter whether or not there is a causal relationship?

- Yes – if we are concerned about explanation, understanding, and intervention

Evidence - DRF

- Correctional treatment effect sizes are relatively modest - room for improvement
- It has proved difficult to identify meaningful shifts in DRF during and following treatment, may be because the construct of DRF underlying the different measures is poorly formulated, resulting in fluctuating or unstable data (Cording et al., 2016; Beech et al., 2015)
- As in medicine, better mechanistic explanations of crime and reoffending are likely to result in greater awareness of possible intervention targets

Criticisms

- Thornton (2016) - dominant view of DRF as offence supportive propensities neglects human agency, and so fails to focus on the causes of criminal behavior
- Cording & Beggs-Christofferson (2016) - concerns about construct validity and calls for theoretically driven research
- Ward & Fortune, 2016a - "the theoretical legitimacy of incorporating dynamic risk factors into the domain of treatment depends on their causal status" (p. 80)

What are DRF?

- Descriptions of problems typically observed in individuals who persistently offend and in their environments
- Broad areas indicating vulnerability rather than specific causes of offending
- Summaries of putative causal factors, contextual features and mental state variables
- DRF and PF are "families of related constructs" (Thornton et al., 2017, p. 30)

Recent Progress

- Agency: goal-directed behaviour (Ward & Maruna, 2007; Heffernan & Ward, 2015; Thornton, 2016; Ward, 2017)

- Need to understand human nature (Durrant, 2017)

- Mind as a predictive engine (Seligman et al., 2016)

- Multi-level nested systems (Ward, 2017; Heffernan & Ward, 2017)

Prediction/Prospection

"Mental process of projecting and evaluating future possibilities and then using these projections for the guidance of thought and action" (Seligman et al., 2016, p. 6)

"Biology must find a way of representing not only the physical and social environment and its possibilities, but of representing and comparing the values at stake – benefits and costs must function as weights in the selection of actions and in the allocation of effort" (Seligman et al., 2016, p. 24)

Key Concepts

- First Person Perspective – subjectivity (Baker, 2016)
- Causal models – mental representations of social and physical contexts
- Emotion – its critical role in guiding and giving meaning to alternative courses of action
- Planning – Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010)
- Reflection/Feedback - learning
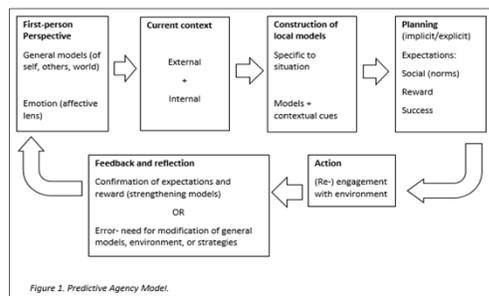
Predictive-Agency Model (Heffernan & Ward, 2017)

Figure 1. Predictive Agency Model.
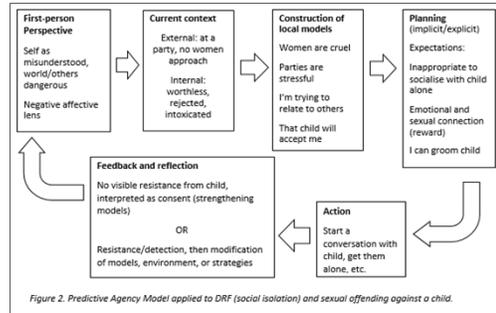
Example: Linking DRF with Behaviour

Figure 2. Predictive Agency Model applied to DRF (social isolation) and sexual offending against a child.

Conclusions

- The field has come a long way from identifying correlates/predictors
- DRF are not theoretically coherent, their causal status is uncertain
- A comprehensive account of *human functioning* can provide better information about the causes of (and possible solutions to) sexual offending
- Much theoretical work remains in providing depth to the model and exploring the mechanisms underpinning predictive agency

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