Introduction to Actuarial Risk Assessment for Ongoing Workers
Florida Department of Children and Families
June 2014
Learning Objectives

At the end of this 30-minute module, participants should be able to understand and answer:

- What is an actuarial risk assessment?
- What is the purpose of an actuarial risk assessment in child protective services?
- How was Florida’s actuarial risk assessment developed? What is the research is behind it?
- Why is risk level important for ongoing services?
- How will ongoing services reassess risk?
The Purpose
Central Questions

• What is the likelihood of future harm?
• Should the family receive or continue to receive intervention services?
What is an actuarial risk assessment?
Can we predict the future?
Asks specifically: “Based on the family’s characteristics, how likely are they to abuse or neglect their children in the next 24 months?”

Actuarial risk assessment is:

- A classification, not prediction;
- Done once at the end of the investigation; and
- Followed by related assessments that help assess changes in risk level for ongoing workers.
True or False? An actuarial risk assessment tries to answer the question, “Based on the family’s characteristics, how likely are they to abuse or neglect their children in the next 24 months?”

A.) True  
B.) False
True or False? An actuarial risk assessment predicts behavior and says with certainty that a very high-risk family will harm their child again.

A.) True
B.) False
What is the research behind actuarial risk assessments?
Research

- Limited set of factors that have a proven relationship to future adverse events
- Reliability
- Validity
- Equity
Reliability

Agreement on Risk Scores

Sample: Four independent ratings of 80 cases.
NCCD Children’s Research Center, 1997
Validity

18-Month Substantiation Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research (N = 929)</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresno (N = 876)</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington (N = 908)</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Re-Substantiation Within Two Years

N = 5,694
California Risk Validation Study, 2003
### California Risk Study Results

#### Outcomes by Risk Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Low (n=352)</th>
<th>Moderate (n=1,067)</th>
<th>High (n=819)</th>
<th>Very High (n=273)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referrals</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantiations</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injury</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious Injury</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removal</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 2,511 investigations conducted in 1995, followed for two years.
NCCD Children’s Research Center, 1998
True or False? *Studies show that high-risk families have higher rates of referral, substantiation, serious injury, and removal than low-risk families.*

A.) True

B.) False
How is an actuarial risk assessment developed?
The Process: Original California Risk Assessment

Retrospective Design and Validation

Hypothesis

Wait ...

Sample families from administrative data

Check outcomes
### Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible Factors</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior actions</td>
<td>Future reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current conditions</td>
<td>Future substantiations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caregiver characteristics</td>
<td>Injuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family characteristics</td>
<td>Severe injuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Protective placement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What makes a good item?

**Not Good**

- Secondary Caregiver Substance Use
  - Yes: 25.0%
  - No: 75.0%

**Good**

- Primary Caregiver Substance Use
  - Yes: 100.0%
  - No: 0.0%
True or False? Only some of the items on the risk assessment have a correlation with future substantiation.

A.) True

B.) False
True or False? *Florida’s risk assessment is based on the California risk assessment, which has been validated in California and other places and will be validated in Florida.*

A.) True

B.) False
What does the risk assessment mean for ongoing workers?
Focusing Resources Reduces Future Harm

New Substantiated Allegation Within Six Months

- Low: 2.6% [Closed], 2.9% [Opened]
- Moderate: 6.4% [Closed], 5.1% [Opened]
- High: 11.3% [Closed], 5.6% [Opened]
- Very High: 15.3% [Closed], 7.6% [Opened]

N = 30,903 children with a substantiated allegation
Case promotion decisions made January through June 2011.
2011 California Combined Report
Safety and risk level inform services

Safe
- Low or moderate risk
  - No family support services

Unsafe with in-home plan
- Any risk level
  - Community-based care (CBCs)

Unsafe with out-of-home plan
- Any risk level
  - Community-based care (CBCs)

Safe
- High or very high risk
  - Eligible for family support services
Assessments Help Us Focus on Families Most at Risk
Risk level tells us how worried to be
Mini Quiz

**True or False?** *Risk level can be used to help direct resources toward the children who are most in need of protection from future harm.*

A.) True

B.) False
What is the risk reassessment?
Two versions: In-home, Out-of-home

Reassessment for out-of-home cases

Reassessment for in-home cases
Reunification assessment: out-of-home care

Includes three new questions:

- Original risk level
- New substantiations during review period
- Progress on case plan

Guides decisions on:

- Return home
- Continued reunification
- Change in permanency plan
Risk Reassessment

Informing case closure decisions
Risk reassessment: in-home care

- Includes 10 questions, half are the same as on the original risk assessment and half assess family status and progress towards case plan.
- Guides in the following decisions:
  - Unsafe → Remain open
  - Safe with low or moderate risk → Close
  - Safe with high or very risk → Likely open, discuss with supervisor
Mini Quiz

**True or False?** Ongoing workers should do BOTH an in-home and out-of-home risk reassessment for each case.

A.) True

B.) False
Thank you!