ATAP Certification:
Core Competency 3:
Threat Assessment &
Management Principles &
Practices

Presented by:
Mario J. Scalora, Ph.D.

http://psychology.unl.edu/targeted-violence/home

Purpose of This Presentation

• Provide some specific insight and explanation of certain sections of the ATAP Certification Program
• Use information from the relevant sources in the Body of Knowledge, which is the source of all test questions, to provide illustrations of certain knowledge, skills, or abilities (KSA’s) which can be tested in the Certification Program Examination

No statements made in this presentation should be taken as information that will supersede information from the utilized Body of Knowledge

No real test questions or specific answers to real test questions will be revealed during this presentation
ATAP Threat Assessment and Management Certification Project

• Core Competencies
  ➢ Information Gathering
  ➢ Interpretation of Information
  ➢ Threat Assessment and Management Principles and Practices
  ➢ Legal Issues
  ➢ Ethical Issues
  ➢ Literacy Across Disciplines
  ➢ Consultation and Communication

Threat Assessment & Management Principles & Practices: Specific Capability Overview

• Understand terminology and models
• Apply threat management strategies
• Use relevant tools and methodologies
• Apply knowledge of relevant mental health risk factors and management
• Summarize key literature in the field of TA/TM
Understand Terminology & Models

- Knowledge of key terms in the practice of TA/TM
- Describe the pathways to violence model
  - Apply the pathways to violence model to a fact pattern
- Define types of targeted violence
  - Domestic violence
  - Stalking
  - Public figure
  - Corporate

Threat Assessment Literature

Threat assessment literature (see especially Borum, Fein, Vossekuil, & Berglund, 1999) suggests:

- Threat, approach, and attack behavior are the products of discernible processes of thinking and behavior
- An individual’s motives and target selection are directly connected
- Precipitation may involve a personal/significant stressor
Threat Assessment

• Movement of Idea to action
• Targeted violence is not random or spontaneous
• Not all threats are created equal

TA: Key Foundational Assumptions

• Emphasis dynamic factors (e.g., behavioral, clinical, situational) versus focus upon static factors
• Idiographic or case-driven approach
• Risk management instead of prediction
• Potential victim and offender versus generalized considerations
• Instrumental/Predatory violence
6. Attack
5. Breach
4. Preparation
3. Research & Planning
2. Ideation
1. Grievance
Pathway to Violence

1. Grievance
2. Ideation
3. Research & Planning
4. Preparation
5. Breach
6. Attack

Settling upon the idea that violence is justified and necessary

Going beyond the idea to figure out how to consummate the violence
Pathway to Violence

1. Grievance
2. Ideation
3. Research & Planning
4. Preparation
5. Breach
6. Attack


Obtaining the necessary equipment and taking other actions required to initiate the plan

Initiating the plan to circumvent the target’s security in order to launch the attack
Use Relevant Tools and Methodologies

- Describe components and application of structured professional judgment
  - Relies on guidelines to structure the exercise of professional discretion
  - Process:
    - Gather information
    - Determine presence of risk factors
    - Determine relevance of risk factors
    - Develop formulation of violence risk
    - Develop scenarios of violence
    - Develop case management plans
    - Conclusory opinions
Use Relevant Tools and Methodologies

• Identify current tools, their uses and limitations in TA/TM

TA & Violence Risk Assessment Tools

• Cawood Assessment & Intervention Grids
• RAGE-V (ATAP)
• HCR-20 Version 3
• WAVR-21(Meloy & White)
Other Specialized Measures

- Stalking Assessment & Management (SAM; Kropp, Hart, & Lyon, 2008)
- Stalking Risk Profile (SRP) (MacKenzie, MeEwen, Pathe, James, Ogloff, Miullen)
- Spousal Assault Risk Assessment Guide (SARA; Kropp, Hart, Webster, & Eaves)
  {note also Brief Spousal Assault Form for the Evaluation of Risk (B-SAFER) for brief assessment contexts}

Apply Knowledge of Relevant Mental Health Risk Factors

After initial consideration of threat posed, the following areas should be considered more closely:

- Contextual Factors
- Subject Factors
- Behavioral Activity
- Motivational Factors
- Target Factors
- Protective Factors
Apply Knowledge of Relevant Mental Health Risk Factors

After initial consideration of threat posed, the following areas should be considered more closely:

- Contextual Factors
- Subject Factors
- Behavioral Activity
- Motivational Factors
- Target Factors
- Protective Factors

- Recent act of targeted violence?
- Recent threatening, or violent events? (Copy cat issue as well as instigation)
- Anniversary of significant event approaching?

- Prior arrest record or prior harassment/threat-related activity?
- Problematic contacts with other agencies?
- Recent life stressors?
- Presence of mental illness symptoms?
Apply Knowledge of Relevant Mental Health

After initial consideration of threat posed, the following areas should be considered more closely:

- Contextual Factors
- Subject Factors
- Behavioral Activity
- Motivational Factors
- Target Factors
- Protective Factors

Intensity of effort as indicated by:

- Leakage of intentions
- Persistent threatening or concerning behavior
- Accomplices sought or alleged
- Reported threat with a specific plan
- Written plans/list
- Weapon present or available
- Rehearsal behavior
Intensity of Pursuit/Effort

- Particularly noted in public figure threat research (Meloy, James, Scalora)
- Superordinate variable looking at frequency and duration of communications, multiple means of communication, target dispersion
- Potentially significant predictor of approach

Leakage

- Leakage in the context of threat assessment is the communication to a third party of an intent to do harm to a target. (Meloy, 2011)
- Leakage occurs when a subject “intentionally or unintentionally reveals clues to feelings, thoughts, fantasies, attitudes, or intentions that may signal an impending violent act.” (O’Toole, 2000)
Excerpt from Jeff Weise's Nazi chatboard posts

- “Hmn, after a recent discussion with some misinformed people I had to ask you guys, why are people so close minded? By the way, I'm being blamed for a threat on the school I attend because someone said they were going to shoot up the school on 4/20, Hitlers birthday, and just because I claim being a National Socialist, guess whom they've pinned?”
Apply Knowledge of Relevant Mental Health Risk Factors

After initial consideration of threat posed, the following areas should be considered more closely:

• Contextual Factors
• Subject Factors
• Behavioral Activity
• Motivational Factors
• Target Factors
• Protective Factors

• Nature of subject’s motivation?
• Help-seeking behavior?
• Motives driven by mental illness?
• Seeking revenge/retaliation for perceived injustice or harm?

Bottom Line: The More Personal, The Higher the Concern (also called “Intimacy Effect”)

Intimacy Effect

• The predictive level of threats as pre-incident indicators of violence increased in proportion to the degree of intimacy between the subject and the target.
• Intimacy as perceived by subject
Threatening Language

Threat cases already receive heightened attention due to the effect upon victims

Hunters and Howlers

• Most Howlers only “howl”
• Most Hunters only “hunt”
• Some do both!
Apply Knowledge of Relevant Mental Health Risk Factors and Management (cont.)

Threatening Activity

- All threats must be taken seriously
- Generally literature notes little direct predictive relationship between direct threats and subsequent violence (especially Political Figure lit)
- However, more substantial relationship between direct threats and other types of violence (i.e., stalking & domestic violence)

Re Threats of violence, Warren, Mullen & McEwan note the following in evaluating threats:

- All threats be taken seriously
- Assessment of risk of enactment and repetition (including how threat is delivered such as leakage & what threat represents)
- Development of management approach of threatener that is risk-based
- Consideration of how current practices may aggravate situation
Threatening Language & Approach

Based upon research (Scalora, James), cases involving subjects with:
– obvious/serious mental illness, and
– prior approach history
pose a significantly higher risk when threats are made

Electronic Communications: Recent Research

• When threats present, electronically communicating subjects not as likely to approach, unless communication was part of a campaign with other forms of communication (e.g., phone, letters).
• More threatening language
• More likely to contain obscenity

Apply Knowledge of Relevant Mental Health Risk Factors

After initial consideration of the threat posed, the following areas should be considered more closely:

- Contextual Factors
- Subject Factors
- Behavioral Activity
- Motivational Factors
- Target Factors
- Protective Factors

Subject view target as responsible for current situation or difficulties?

Target media presence? High Profile?

Target Focus but contacts multiple entities (maintains focus of issue and motives across contacts) Sometimes referred to as Fixation

Apply Knowledge of Relevant Mental Health Risk Factors and Management (cont.)

- Define elements of the RAGE-V
  - Triggers
  - Inhibitors
  - Risk factors
  - Process variables
Apply Knowledge of Relevant Mental Health Risk Factors and Management (cont.)

- Define elements of the RAGE-V
  - Triggers
  - Inhibitors
  - Risk factors
  - Process variables

- Pending perceived negative job event
- Rejection and abandonment
- Increased psychosis
- Civil (family court, child custody, etc.) or criminal justice system event(s)
- Disruption of support system
- Financial problems.

Apply Knowledge of Relevant Mental Health Risk Factors and Management (cont.)

- Define elements of the RAGE-V
  - Triggers
  - Inhibitors
  - Risk factors
  - Process variables

- Treatment availability, utilization, and past receptivity
- Family
- Other social support
- Spiritual or religious beliefs opposing violence
- Connectedness and healthy affectional bonds.
Apply Knowledge of Relevant Mental Health Risk Factors and Management (cont.)

- Define elements of the RAGE-V
  - Triggers
  - Inhibitors
  - Risk factors
  - Process variables

- Weapons use
  - Motivational factors
  - Drug use
  - Head trauma
  - Criminal history
  - Prior voluntary or involuntary commitments
  - Past suicide attempts, or suicide ideation, to include suicidal thoughts, statements, gestures, and attempts

- Adverse responses to authority and limit setting
- Reference groups, heroes, affiliations, and community attachments
- History of mental problems that compromise coping, or enhance appeal of violence
- Perceptions of injustice or insoluble problems.
Apply Knowledge of Relevant Mental Health Risk Factors and Management (cont.)

- Define elements of the RAGE-V
  - Triggers
  - Inhibitors
  - Risk factors
  - Process variables

- Approach behavior
- Evidence of escalation – threats, proximity seeking
- Fantasy rehearsal
- Evidence of deterioration – deteriorating mental state, psychosis
- Actively violent state of mind – suicidal or homicidal thoughts
- Command hallucinations, thought insertion/withdrawal, paranoia of imminent threat
- Diminishing inhibitions
- Diminishing or impaired coping
- Inability or limited view or ability to pursue other options

- Obsession
- Evaporating protective inhibitors
- Sense of inevitability (tunnel vision, foregone conclusion)
- Pre-attack or ritualistic preparatory actions (writing of suicide note, suicide video, religious rituals, purchase of camouflage clothing)
- Recent acquisition or preparation of weapons, escalation of practice with no sanctioned reason
- Subject’s response to assessment and inquiries
Apply Knowledge of Relevant Mental Health Risk Factors and Management (cont.)

• Describe relationship of risk factors, triggers, inhibitors and process variable to threat behavior
  – Mental health
    • Role and limits of treatment
  – Developmental level
  – Links to medical condition
  – Group behavior

Apply Knowledge of Relevant Mental Health Risk Factors and Management (cont.)

• Recognize professional limitations pertinent to TA/TM when conceptualizing risk level
Summarize key literature in the field of TA/TM

• Understand seminal works and their contribution to the field
• Able to define key terms

Sample Definitions RAGE-V

• Commitments: In this context it refers to involuntary or less than voluntary hospitalizations for psychological problems. Hospitalizations occur when someone poses a danger to themselves or others.
• Inevitability: The belief that no matter what actions one takes the course of events will not change.
• Mitigation Strategies: Implementation of measures to lessen or eliminate the occurrence or impact of an incident of potential violence.
• Protective Inhibitors: Beliefs, relationships, injuries, lack of resources, or abilities that can limit whether a person is likely to follow through with dangerous conduct.
Threat Management

encourage review of Calhoun & Weston 2003, 2009; Cawood, 2009

Accountability

“Someone is Watching You”

Or in case of those suffering from paranoid ideation:

“Someone else is watching you”
Dynamic Assessment Process

Key Components of Management Process

- Recognize need for threat management process
- Assign responsibilities of monitoring to persons trained in TA
- Liaison with appropriate parties related to protectees to facilitate tracking
- Need for incident tracking system & documentation
- Liaison with other agencies
- Use consistent and valid TA methods
- Apply TA strategies flexibly and intelligently

Calhoun & Weston (2009)
Risk Management Issues: Accountability

- A multidisciplinary focus
- Need for collateral contacts
- Coordination of information
- Need for agreements re: nature of how information from sources will be obtained, maintained and shared across parties

Information Sharing

Law enforcement, Probation

Information Coordinator

Subject/Perpetrator

Clinician(s)

Significant others/partners

Victim(s), Target(s) of Activity
Practical Issues

• Need to designate a Point of Contact for team members to share information re subject
• Need a Point of Contact for subject to liaison with to avoid mix messages or confusion
  – Allows for rapport building
  – Clarity of messaging
  – Avoid parties being played off against each other

Apply Threat Management Strategies

• Identify types of threat management strategies
  – Do nothing
  – Watch and wait
  – Third party intervention
  – Interview
    • To gather info
    • To assist
    • To confront
Apply Threat Management Strategies (cont.)

Identify types of threat management strategies (cont.)
  – Administrative actions
  – Active and passive monitoring
  – Arrest and prosecution

• Understand the cause and effect of implementing the most appropriate strategies to prevent harm

Use Relevant Tools and Methodologies

• Identify current tools, their uses and limitations in TA/TM
  – Assessor must avoid sole reliance on checklist/instrument/tool
  – Assessor must be trained and qualified on relevant instrument or tool
  – Instrumentation utilized must be reliable and valid as well as appropriate for the issue at hand
  – Assessor must be aware of the limitations of any instrumentation utilized
  – Assessor must stay current with new developments and outdated versions.
Use Relevant Tools and Methodologies

• Understand the appropriate use of additional assessment methods in TA/TM
  – Fitness for duty
  – Mental health evaluation

References

Contact Information:

Mario J. Scalora, Ph.D.  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

mscalora1@unl.edu

http://psychology.unl.edu/targeted-violence/home