DVD REVIEW

Assessing Violent Risk by Dr. J. Reid Meloy

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This DVD is an introduction to the topic of violent risk assessment, and is narrated by Dr. J. Reid Meloy, a forensic psychologist. The DVD begins with a clinical case study of a violent offender, Samuel Jones. Samuel Jones was charged with three counts of assault with a weapon and one charge of vandalism, after pointing a gun randomly at various individuals and objects over a period of time. After undergoing a psychiatric evaluation, he was found not guilty by reason of insanity. This case study illustrates the challenges that professionals are faced with when assessing violence and indicates that although violence cannot be predicted accurately and may be over-predicted, it still remains important for professionals to comment on the risk of violence. The aim of this DVD is to expose mental health professionals to the violent risk assessment model, which is used to assist professionals to make an informed probability statement regarding the risk of violence.

According to the model, violence is defined as an overt act that causes or is likely to cause physical injury. The model assumes that violence is caused by social, psychological, and biological factors. These three factors of the model indicate that violence risk assessment should be assessed by professionals from an disciplinary team that includes medicine, psychology, and social work. These are discussed as follows:

- Psychological factors: Relevant data from group norms and individuals are evaluated. When considering the individual who is evaluated, the following should be taken into consideration: Past history of violence (frequency and recency of violence); gender and age (these serve as a guideline, and should not be used on their own); paranoia (a person with paranoid tendencies may assault
the object of his or her delusions); other forms of mental illness (particularly among individuals who are actively psychotic); intense emotions and weak control mechanisms to deal with these emotions; intelligence (an individual with a low IQ may have a greater risk of impulsive violence, but a psychopath with an above average to high IQ may also be at risk as he or she is more likely to use a weapon or to carry out certain types of crimes that need more planning such as kidnapping); and attachment disorders (personality disorders such as borderline personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, histrionic personality disorder and anti-social personality disorder may predispose an individual towards violence committed towards themselves or towards another person due to an enduring pattern of maladaptive interactions with others that may include subjective distress).

- Social and environmental factors: An individual’s personal history and current situation may trigger violent behaviour. These include early experiences of violence; socio economic status; employment or economic instability; peer pressure (this is not only in adolescent populations and may be a powerful trigger where social groups endorse violence); weapon access and training; potential victim pool (this includes the likely victims and the larger the victim pool the more likely that violence will occur); alcohol and psychostimulants; and popular cultural influence (the role the media plays in violence).

- Biological factors: This should be considered when the violent behaviour is sudden, rage filled, explosive, lacking obvious purpose and is followed by genuine remorse. A trained professional within this field such as a psychiatrist, neuropsychologist, and neurologist should assist. The following should be taken into consideration: History of CNS trauma, neurological soft signs and positive neurological results.

These factors are illustrated with the use of the case study of Samuel Jones. The more factors that occur and co-occur, the greater the likelihood that the individual is at risk to commit a violent crime. The coverage of the topic is clear and concise and the viewer is exposed to illustrations of the model, which make the topic understandable. This is a useful aid for those interested in violent risk assessment.

**Title:** Assessing Violent Risk  
**Forensic Psychologist:** Dr. J. Reid Meloy  
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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Charmaine Collins-McKinnell is a final year Master’s student in Clinical Psychology at Unisa. Her research interests include forensic work, violence, and victim assessment.