



Criminal Justice Data Used to Develop the Public Safety Assessment

Background

Historically, the majority of pretrial risk assessments have been developed using data from a single county. In more recent years, several jurisdictions interested in creating risk tools that reflect broader demographic and geographic diversity developed instruments using datasets from multiple jurisdictions. Each of these tools assessed a defendant's risk of new criminal activity (NCA) and failure to appear in court (FTA)—and all combined the risk of NCA and FTA into one raw score.

PSA Development

In creating the Public Safety Assessment (PSA), leading criminal justice researchers wanted to build upon the strength of tools developed from multi-jurisdictional datasets. Specifically, they wanted to create an assessment that would, for the first time, provide separate risk scores for NCA and FTA and flag defendants who pose a risk of new violent criminal activity (NVCA).

The researchers analyzed criminal cases from hundreds of jurisdictions across the United States in order to identify the strongest predictors—across jurisdictions—of three pretrial outcomes: NCA, NVCA, and FTA. The team conducted an exhaustive review of potential data sources that:

- (1) Had been used to develop and/or validate a pretrial risk assessment currently in use.
- (2) Contained data from multiple jurisdictions.

The group identified nine datasets that met the requirements, including seven sets from the states of Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Kentucky, Ohio, Maine, and Virginia. These sets were comprised of information from 189 individual counties and cities. The remaining two datasets came from the federal court system—specifically, U.S. Pretrial Services and the District of Columbia. These sets included information from all 94 federal judicial districts.

Together, the nine datasets captured 1,515,051 cases. Of these, the research team narrowed their study to the 746,525 cases in which defendants were released at some point in the pretrial process. The datasets contained 960 potential risk factors. The research team conducted a meta-analysis, followed by bivariate and multivariate analyses, to reveal the strongest predictors of FTA, NCA, and NVCA. For the nine risk factors that proved most predictive, researchers found that the rate of FTA and NCA increased by 5 percent or more if the factor was present, compared to when it was absent. They also found that the rate of NVCA nearly doubled when each of the factors was present, compared to when it was absent.

Datasets

Datasets used to develop the PSA were obtained from the following jurisdictions:

Colorado

Adams County, Arapahoe County, Boulder County, Denver County, Douglas County, El Paso County, Jefferson County, Larimer County, Mesa County, Weld County, and City of Denver.

Connecticut

Statewide, including all eight counties.

Florida

Alachua County, Manatee County, Osceola County, Palm Beach County, Pinellas County, and Volusia County.

Kentucky

Statewide, including all 120 counties.

Ohio

Butler County, Cuyahoga County, Summit County, Franklin County, Hamilton County, Richland County, and Warren County.

Maine

Lincoln County, Sagadahoc County, and Waldo County.

Virginia

Ten pretrial service agencies covering 35 cities and counties. Agencies included Blue Ridge Court Services; Chesterfield Community Corrections and Pretrial Services; Colonial Community Corrections and Pretrial Services; Hampton-Newport News Criminal Justice Agency; Henrico County Community Corrections; OAR/Jefferson Area Community Corrections; Lynchburg Community Corrections and Pretrial Services; Mecklenburg County Piedmont Court Services; Rappahannock Regional Jail; and Old Dominion Court Services Pretrial and Local Probation.

Federal Pretrial Services

All federal judicial districts except for the District of Columbia¹.

District of Columbia²

¹ The research team obtained the Federal Court dataset because it was used to develop the Federal Pretrial Risk Assessment Instrument (PTRA). The original PTRA was based on data from 93 of 94 federal judicial districts.

² The research team obtained the District of Columbia dataset because it was used to develop and validate the D.C. Pretrial Services Agency Risk Assessment.