



Protective Factors and Dynamic Risk factors: An Integrative Model

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Key Papers

- Heffernan, R. & Ward, T. (2017). Towards a comprehensive theory of dynamic risk and protective factors in forensic and correctional practice. *Manuscript under review*.
- Ward, T. (2017). Prediction and agency: The role of protective factors in correctional rehabilitation and desistance. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 32*, 19-28.
- Ward, T & Fortune, C. (2016). The role of dynamic risk factors in the explanation of offending. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 29*, 79-88.



Argument

- Lack of theoretical analysis of DRF & PF in forensic and correctional domains.
- *Protective factors are the internal and external capacities and personal priorities that enhance individuals well-being and reduce the likelihood that they will harm others or themselves in the future (recidivism focus!).*
- Support the exercise of agency: goal formulation, planning. and subsequent action in service of the plans.



Argument

- *Dynamic risk factors* are impairments in the capacities and conditions required for effective and ethically acceptable agency.
- Therefore, theoretical work should be centered around an account of protective factors rather than treating DRF as primary: We should adopt a *positive approach*.
- Interventions based on an agency model of protective (and dynamic risk) factors) should be future oriented, contextual, multilevel, and “holistic.”
- *Focus is on action in context not internal structure.*



Dynamic Risk Factors

- Variable risk factors and causal risk markers: dynamic risk factors with latter being called “criminogenic needs.
- Distinction between static and dynamic risk factors reflected in current assessment practices and in goal of *risk reduction*.
- The recruitment of dynamic risk factors to formulate cases and to inform treatment is now standard clinical practice.



Dynamic Risk Factors

Mann et al (2010) argue that risk factors are plausible partial causes of sexual offending and predict reoffending.

Propose that most strongly supported variables should be emphasized in both assessment and treatment of sexual offenders.

Emotional regulation problems, deviant sexual interest, offence supportive attitudes and beliefs, general dysregulation problems, and social intimacy deficits.

Thus assumed to have explanatory role in research and practice!



Dynamic Risk Factors: Problems

- *Lack coherence*: Cause, context or state/symptom
- *Lack specificity*: Which cause?
- *Lack Precision*: What level?
- *Lack factualness*: normative constructs
- Thus: Predictive NOT explanatory constructs



Recent Theories

Mann, Hanson, Thornton (2010)- *Psychologically meaningful risk factors*

Beech& Ward (2004)- *An etiological model of risk*

Thornton (2016)- *Developing a theory of dynamic risk - GLM, Schema, TRA*

Ward & Fortune (2016)- *From dynamic risk factors to causal processes: a methodological framework.*



Dynamic Risk Factors

- All of the models are useful although none succeed in fully describing the nature of DRF, or crucially, depict the way they cause/maintain offending lifestyles.
- Because of their origins in risk prediction accounts of DRF not aligned with current psychological research and theories on multilevel nature of human functioning.
- From neuroscience to subjectivity!



Protective factors

- Increasing interest in utility of *positive factors* in forensic and correctional practice coinciding with the growth of positive psychology in mental health.
- Hope that if identify social and psychological processes capable *of buffering effects of adversity* and modifying risk elements, may be possible to reduce chances of individuals hurting themselves or others.
- Also, facilitate *engagement* and *desistance*.



Protective Factors

- We are still unsure what they are, how they influence behaviour, and how they relate to risk (conceptually and functionally).
- *Definitional ambiguity*: resilience, strengths, buffering, promotive, desistance and positive factors, reducing offending or mitigating factors etc?
- *Practitioner uncertainty*: risk predictors, potential treatment targets & in guiding social reentry and integration.
- *Explanatory confusion*: specificity, context, state, normative status.
- *Dual nature*: expertise versus risk.



Two Recent Theories

De Vries thesis, etc. (2014) – *Protection Pathway Model*

- Four main mechanisms by which protective factors have an impact on risk level: the risk reducing effect (impact directly on DRF), the moderator effect (buffer effect of DRF), the main effect (general + effect), and the motivator effect (positive effect each other).
- Problems re logic and also its really a list theory.



Two Recent Theories

Serin, Chadwick & Lloyd (2017) – *Agency Filter Model*

- Person interprets the meaning of the dynamic risk and positive events through psychological filter (e.g., hope, self- efficacy, causal attributions) and acts in ways that either increase or decrease the likelihood of further offending.
- Problems: Agency underplayed, just another variable.



Where To From Here?

- Implications of fact that dynamic risk factors & protective factors cover *all* the major domains of **human functioning**?: emotional, cognitive, biological, contextual, and self-regulatory.
- Protective factors & their role in *promoting agency* should be major focus of theorizing.
- Protective factors operate through the actions of *persons within social contexts*.
- In order to exercise agency individuals *require a range* of interlocking abilities, opportunities, and resources.



Where from here?

- Theory of protective factors should be able to account for the *range of protective features* (resilience, promotive, strengths, etc.) discussed in the literature.
- It's crucial to have something significant to say about the *relationship of PF to dynamic risk factors*.
- Approach the study of maladaptive or deviant functioning via an understanding of *normal functioning* (analogy with psychopathology field) rather than vice versa.



Predictive Agency Model of Protective Factors: Key Ideas.

- Recent evolutionary biology, cognitive, cognitive neuroscience, philosophical, and psychological research suggests that a view of the mind as a *predictive engine* is a fruitful one.
- Composed of capacities that enable individuals to anticipate, plan, simulate and evaluate possible outcomes upon the basis of *continually evolving causal models of the self*, other persons, the social environment, and the future.
- *Predictive or prospective ability* is evident in the whole range of psychological capacities including perception, attention, memory, emotion, and cognition (Bar, 2011a; Clark, 2016; Seligman et al, 2016).



Predictive Agency Model of Protective factors: Key Ideas.

- Predictive capacities & related structures and processes are in service of agency and reflect *a first person perspective* (irreducible level of explanation).
- A first person perspective spells out what *experience-is-like-for-me, from an individual's unique viewpoint (Neisser, 2015)*.
- Critical role of *emotional systems* in the development and operation of agency.
- *Emotions are motivating* (i.e., ready the organism for action), are generally adaptive, and have meaning; they are in effect, *sense making*.



Predictive Agency Model of Protective factors: Key Ideas.

- Comprehensive theory of PF should be a *multilevel one* able to integrate causal processes from the biological through to the social.
- First person perspective and its capacity for agency provides human beings with a unique set of *predictive capacities* which are assisted by affective processes in motivating action, setting priorities and values, and attuning person to threats and benefits.
- *Error signals* fuel learning and provide individuals with the chance to boost the predictive power of their models, to increase their level of skill in managing data, and to utilize this information to achieve their goals (i.e., valued outcomes).



Predictive Agency Model of Protective factors: Key Ideas.

- Thus: human beings are essentially *forward looking* animals who are by nature predisposed to construct plans and predictions to guide behavior.
- Adaptive functioning requires the *acquisition of capacities* and resources to achieve valued outcomes and to avoid and/or escape from potential harm.
- Propose that there are four sets of difficulties associated with agency impairments: those linked to *subjectivity* (first person perspective), *prediction*, *causal models*, and *social contexts*.



Predictive Agency Model of Protective factors: Key Ideas.

- *Subjectivity (first person perspective)*
- Emotional processes play important role in establishing *background affective* tone for agents based on an overall evaluation of their current functional situation: values & meaning.
- Disruptions in the biological systems partially constituting emotions and/or the persistence of negative background moods will *color an individual's world* in a negatively valenced way.
- *DRF: poor emotional regulation (aggression, loneliness etc.), grievance/hostility, general regulation problems, sexual preoccupation, emotional congruence with children*



Predictive Agency Model of Protective factors: Key Ideas.

- *Prediction*
- Individuals are likely to make **prediction errors** when they consistently experience unstable and chaotic internal or social environments.
- Poverty of knowledge & inadequate, *unrepresentative causal models* result in problematic predictions and subsequent actions.
- Lack of relevant information gathering and analysis skills will create difficulties in trying to *resolve any discrepancy* between a prediction and experience.
- *DRF: intimacy deficit, offense supportive beliefs and attitudes, dysfunctional coping, and poor cognitive problem solving*



Predictive Agency Model of Protective factors: Key Ideas.

- *Causal models*
- Causal models are constructed in a *dynamic way to represent local aspects* of persons and environments in which people are currently situated (draw from more general models).
- They are utilized when individuals *consider and evaluate different plans of action*, with their hierarchically ordered sets of goals.
- *Adverse developmental experiences* will result in formation of distorted causal models, ones that were constructed within abusive and impoverished backgrounds.
- *DRF: poor cognitive problem solving, offence supportive attitudes, grievance/hostility, lack of concern for others, and callousness.*



Predictive Agency Model of Protective factors: Key Ideas.

- *Social contexts*
- PAMPS is a *relational model* and assumes that individuals *construct local causal models* to navigate their way in social and physical environments and to promote the successful realization of goals,
- Therefore, a major component of any specific model will be *the social and physical environment*, whether it is the immediate situation or the projected future.
- In *crime conducive situations* the social environment will contain a number of possible crime facilitative elements, all of which can shape the development of crime supportive casual models or else strengthen preexisting ones.
- *DRF: deviant peers, negative social influences, unstable work patterns, and lack of emotionally intimate relationships with adults.*



PAMP: Protective factors

- How can we turn these conclusions into an account of PF?
- Propose that *protective factors are the internal and external capacities and personal priorities that enhance individuals well-being and reduce the likelihood that they will harm others or themselves.*
- In providing or strengthening the capacities for engaging in goal directed action anticipated that practitioners will also *build resilience* in individuals.
- Conditions supporting agency involve *biological processes as well as psychological capacities* such as planning, scenario construction, conditional thinking, emotional sensitivity, and perspective taking.



PAMP: Protective factors

- Critical focus is on the *level of agency* as this reflects the unique viewpoint of persons and is also the locus of prediction and prospection, that is, the level of meaning.
- Desistance or rehabilitation interventions based on this conception of protective factors will aim to ensure that the *conditions for engaging in adaptive agency* are in place.
- Utility of *self-narratives*.



PAMP: Practice

- Interventions should be:
 - *Future focused* (predictive)
 - Attend to *abstract and proximal goals*, and plans for living (causal models)
 - Be sensitive to persons' *core values* (emotions and needs)
 - Be *systemic* in that they take into account all relevant biological, psychological and social systems (social contexts) and levels of analysis.
- *The establishment of the internal and external capacities needed to achieve an intervention life plan in socially acceptable and personally fulfilling ways, can replace risk factors.*



PAMP: Practice

- Seek to construct a coherent, comprehensive understanding of *what matters most to the person* and how the various contexts in which he will be living, can promote its successful implementation.
- It is *not a list approach* and this is a distinct advantage; aim is to use PAMP as a guide to assessment, treatment and ultimately desistance from crime.
- Places importance on the *process or relationship* aspects of intervention, including social contexts.
- In order to identify personal priorities, affective processes and future plans it is necessary to develop *strong relationships* with clients.



Conclusions

- Asserts that attention to ensuring the conditions of predictive agency are in place will increase the chances that individuals will *desist from crime*.
- DRF are *impairments in conditions required for agency*: subjectivity, prediction, local causal models & contextual variables.
- Provides a *framework for incorporating* specific treatment and intervention methods.
- Focus is on *action in context* not internal structure.
- *Forward* rather than backward looking.