

Risk Assessment of Radicalized Offenders in the Belgian Penitentiary Institutions

RASMORAD

Astrid Boelaert, Nico Braspenning



Content

- I. Who are we and what do we do?**
- II. Why risk assessment and different methods**
- III. Who to assess?**
- IV. How to do risk assessment with radicalized offenders?**
- V. Risk assessment of violent extremist offenders with the VERA-2R**





I. WHO ARE WE AND WHAT DO WE DO?



- **Service Psychosocial Expertise**
 - Central level = Central Psychosocial Service
 - Regional level
 - Local (prison) level = Psychosocial Service
 - Psychiatrists
 - Psychologists
 - Social workers



mission of the PSS

- From a scientific point of view, giving advice with respect to conditional release (& other measures)
- Guide detainees through their detention in view of their psychosocial reintegration
- Cooperate on a safe and humane detention



conditional release in Belgium

- Conditional release in Belgium
 - Long history
 - Significant changes after the 'Dutroux case'
 - Main aspects of current legislation:
 - Possible from 1/3 of the sentence
 - Decision by a court (sentence + 3 years) on advice of local prison director & PSS
 - 'yes' except if there are contra-indications



conditional release in Belgium

- Conditional release: contra-indications:
 - Absence of reintegration perspectives
 - **Risk of committing new serious offences**
 - Risk of harassment of his/her victims
 - Attitude towards his/her victims
 - Efforts undertaken to pay compensation to his/her victims





II. WHY RISK ASSESSMENT AND DIFFERENT METHODS



- Risk assessment = assessing the likelihood of committing (serious) new offences in the future

Risk: likelihood + severity + ...

- Risk assessment = process
 - > final goal in our context is to reduce the risk factors and to maximize the chances for a successful reintegration into society



(1) First method: the ‘unstructured clinical method’:

- Oldest, most used and disseminated method of prediction in the forensic field and in other domains



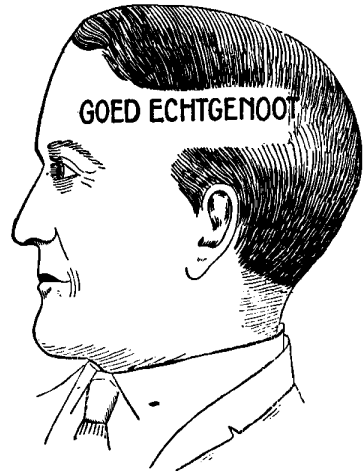
Illustrations from Lombroso's *L'uomo Delinquente*, showing some of the 'physical defects' that the author believed to be distinguishing marks of criminals.



Fig. 20. Type of raze inferior - L'aire abaisse.



Fig. 21. Type raze inferior - L'aire abaisse.



Jonge meisjes, prent U dit profiel goed in het geheugen. Ieder man, die in staat is een goed, trouw echtgenoot te worden, die uwe gevoelens eerbiedigt, heeft een profiel, dat met bovenstaand overeenstemming vertoont.



De omstandigheid, dat de Echte Trouw en de Kinderlijke zeer zwak ontwikkeld zijn tegenover een zeer sterke ontwikkeling van de eigenschap Gestachtelijke Neiging, is oorzaak, dat deze man een slecht echtgenoot zal zijn. Jonge meisjes, die aan het huwelijk denkt, wantrouwt zulk een man!



Fig. 22. Type of raze inferior - L'aire abaisse e forte.



Fig. 23. Type raze inferior (degeneratie) - Straszkows.

(1) First method: the ‘unstructured clinical method’:

- Characteristics:
 - The clinician does not use a tool
 - He determines the riskfactors on which he wants to base himself
 - He decides how to come to a final judgement
 - > On the basis of knowledge, experience, preferences, ...
 - And the way he formulates this final judgement (high, realistic, possible, ...)



(1) First method: the ‘unstructured clinical method’: shortcomings

- Unreliable
- Poor predictive validity



(2) Second Method: the “actuarial” method:

- The **development** of an actuarial tool
 - First selection of possible predictive factors
 - The scoring of these factors in a group of people
 - The follow-up of these persons with regard of relapse (recidivism)
 - Who recidivates in (certain kind of) crime and who doesn't?
 - What factors are associated with recidivism (and how strong is this association)?
 - Selection of the best predictive factors, their weight and combination method
 - Goal: the optimization of the number of correct predictions
- Testing tool on other groups



(2) Second Method: the “actuarial” method

- The use of an actuarial tool:
 - The tool contains the only factors on which he can rely
 - and contains the method to reach a final judgement on the basis of these factors (i.e. an algorithm)
 - This final judgement is an empirically defined probability
 - i.e. the% of the normgroup with a given total score that has achieved a certain outcome (i.c. that has recidivated with a particular type of offence within a certain period)



(2) Second Method: the “actuarial” method:

- Benefits:

- Reliable
- Good predictive validity

- Shortcomings:

- Is normgroup comparable to your subject?
- Static (not focused on what one can do to mitigate the risk)



(3) Third Method: The “structured professional judgement” (SPJ)

- The evaluator uses a tool as a guideline
- This tool contains factors (empirically and/or clinically important) that, at least, should be looked at
- In addition, the evaluator may add other factors
- And the evaluator himself determines how he wants to reach a final judgement on the basis of these factors
 - No scoring, no sum!
- The instrument contains guidelines on expressing the final judgement
 - No numbers!
 - High/Medium/Low



(3) Third Method: The “structured professional judgement” (SPJ):

- Benefits:

- Empirical basis of risk factors
- Risk assessment process: focused on what should be done (risk management strategies)

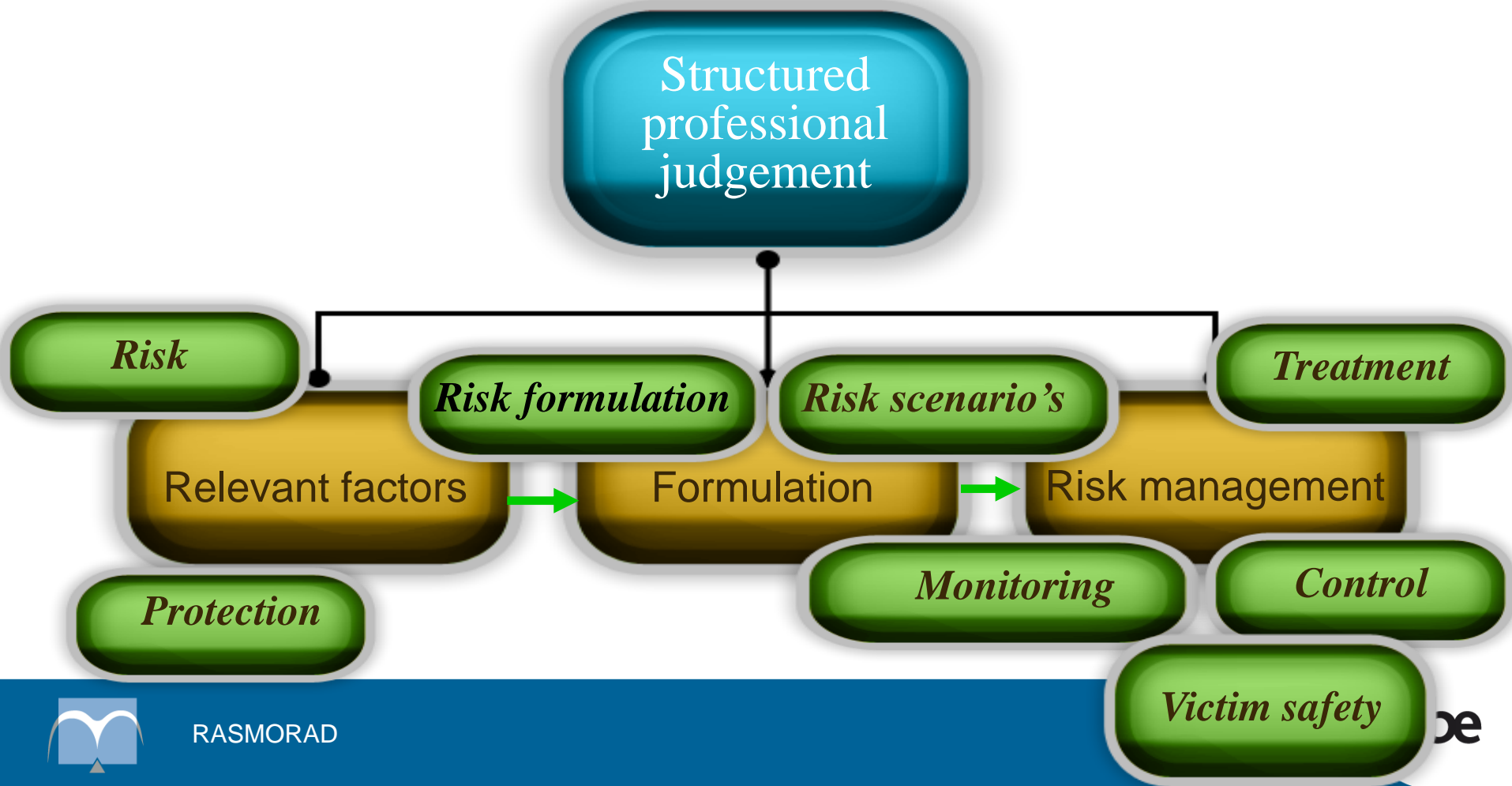
- Shortcomings:

- Remains a clinical judgement



Risk Assessment Process

Doyle & Logan (2011)



Risk assessment violent extremism

Unstructured clinical judgement

Actuarial method

SPJ

Violent Extremism

**Only possibility
until recent past**

Not available

**ERG-22+ & ERS,
VERA-2R**





III. WHO TO ASSESS?

- **Internal list with 4 categories (cell extremism):**
 - A. On remand for or convicted for offences under **terrorism law**
-> automatically
 - B. On remand for or convicted for **terrorism related** offences (e.g. theft with a financial link to terrorism) or equated detainees **meaning that they aren't detained for offences under terrorism law but are showing behavior closely linked to the profile of a violent extremist offender.**
-> multi-agency approach (external partners, CPSS extremism)
 - C. Foreign Terrorist Fighters
-> automatically
 - D. **Detainees showing signals of radicalization or who are radicalizing others**
-> multi-agency approach



- **Starting point is internal list, i.e. detected prisoners**

<u>Total</u>	222
Category A	54 (24%)
Category B	33 (15%)
Category C	97 (44%)
Category D:	38 (17%)

- **Monitoring at local (prison) and at central level (Cell extremism and Central psychosocial service extremism)**



Who?

- **Identified radicalized convicted prisoners**
 - **Category A (terrorism law)**
 - **Category C (FTF)**





IV. HOW TO DO RISK ASSESSMENT OF RADICALIZED OFFENDERS?



Need for sufficient:

- Objective, reliable information
- Time
- Knowledge

It is not fortune telling



Crucial in relation to ALL methods and instruments:

- *“a judgement only can be as good as the info it is based upon”*
- Cf. VERA-2R:

**RISK AND PROTECTIVE
INDICATORS
INFORMED BY
LIMITED BY
STATE OF KNOWLEDGE**



Need for information: Law Enforcement

Judicial information

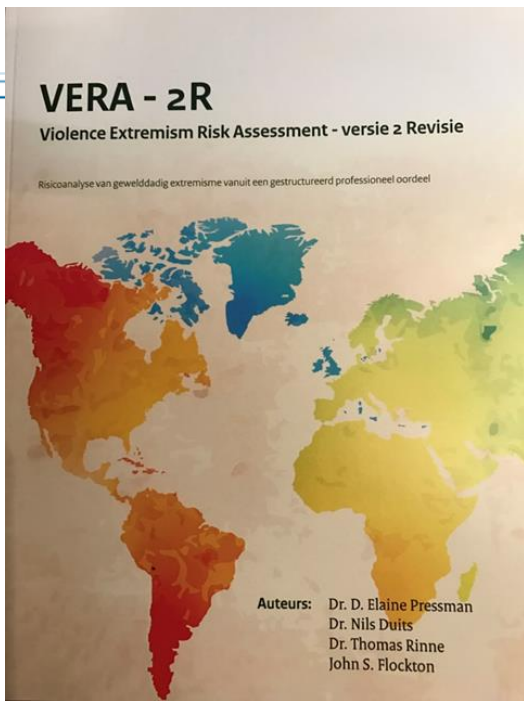
- Surveillance reports
- Pre-sentence reports
- Observations and reports
- Community/other source information
- Interviews (when provided)
- Judges Sentencing Comments (when applicable)
- Psychiatric/Psychological reports
- Ongoing contact



Need for information: Prisons

- Interview(s) with the prisoner
- Hetero-anamnestical information
- Psychiatric/psychological evaluation
- Observations and reports during incarceration
- Community/other source information
- Information about network (family, friends, ...)





V. RISK ASSESSMENT OF VIOLENT EXTREMIST OFFENDERS WITH THE VERA-2R (VIOLENCE EXTREMISM RISK ASSESSMENT)



Who can use VERA-2R?

- Trained individuals in the VERA-2R protocol
- Knowledge base of terrorism
- *Psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, police analysts, intelligence officers,*
- Experience in SPJ-method desirable



■ *“TO BE USED WITH AND LIMITED TO:*

*Persons with **histories** related to **extremist violence** such as arrests or convictions for terrorist related or other ideologically motivated offences or where there is **justifiable concern**, an **objective indication** of activity or other identifiable behaviors related to **ideological violence and intent.**”*

-> already on the radar

-> all extremist ideologies (far left, far right, ...)



VERA (2009)

E. Pressman

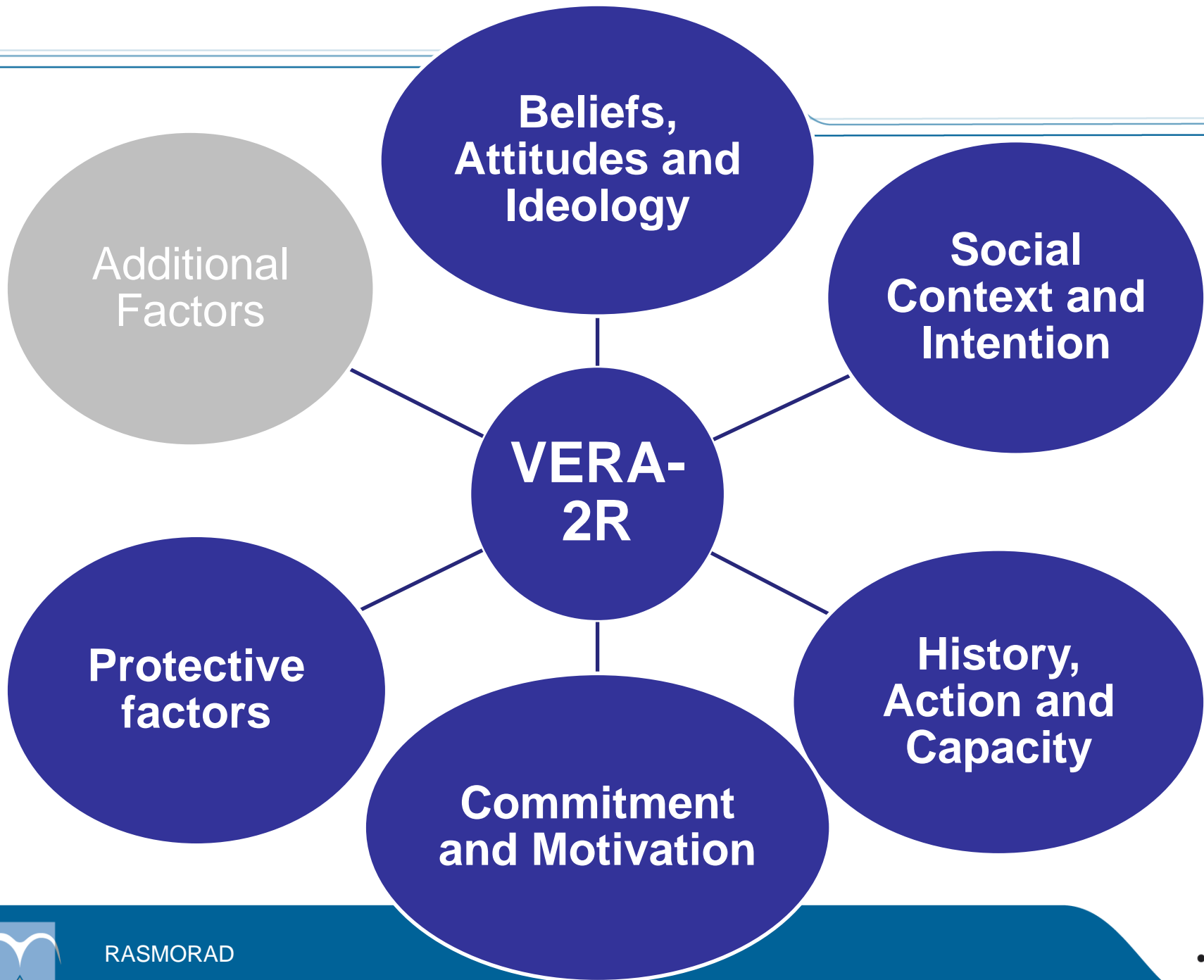
- 31-factors: 5 domains

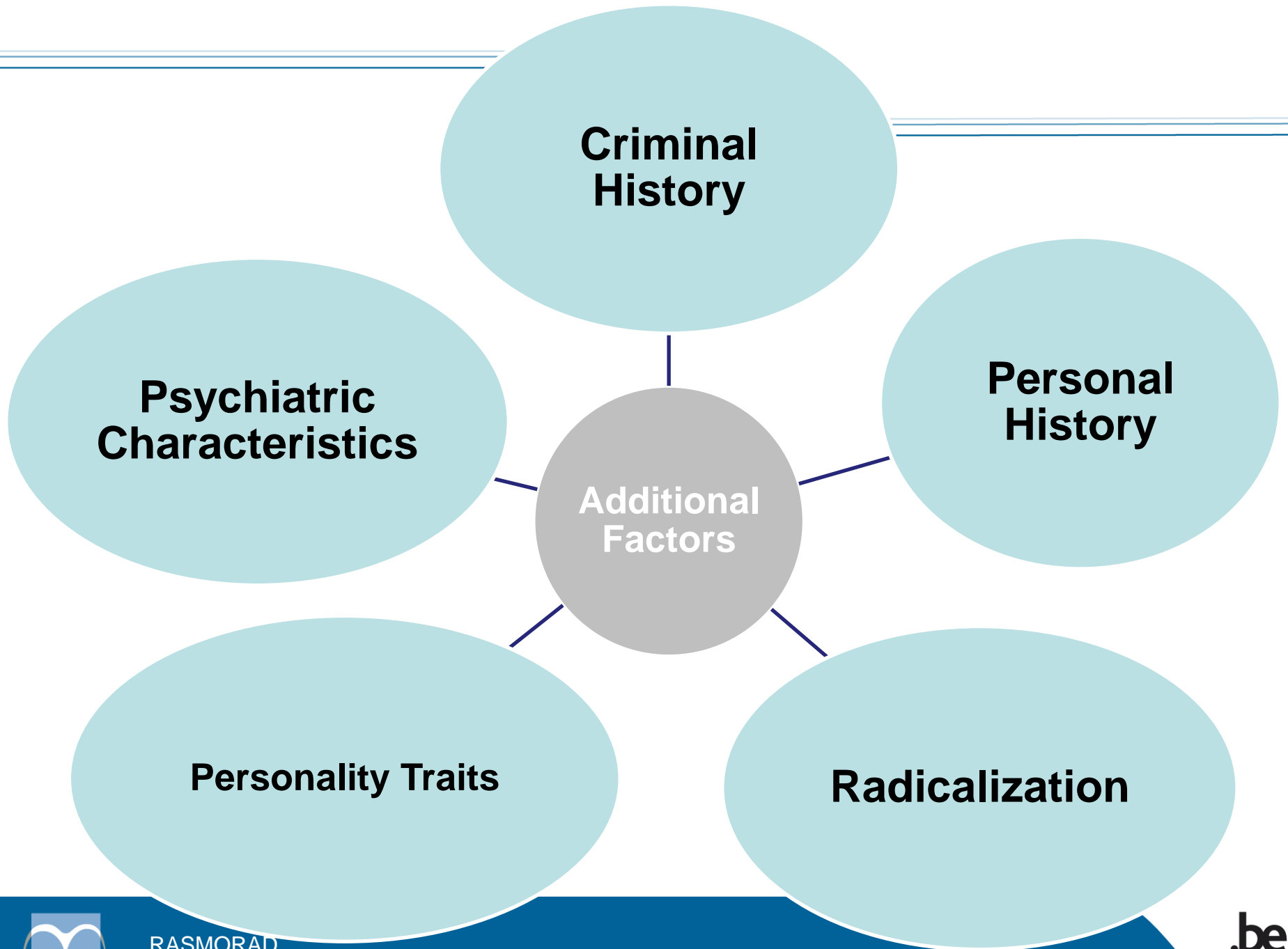
VERA-2R (2016)

E. Pressman + NIFP

- 34-factors: 5 domains
- + 31-additional factors: 5 domains









**Case
Study**

VERA-2R: benefits

- ❑ **Accepted methodology** used in other risk assessment tools (HCR, SARA, ...)
- ❑ **Systematic, structured** judgement
- ❑ Relevant and **empirically** supported indicators for violent extremism
- ❑ Transparent and criteria-based operational **definitions** of indicators increases **interrater reliability**



Example criteria-based operational definitions

BAI-3 Dehumanization of Identified Targets

PROBE QUESTIONS

- What do you think of those you hold responsible for the injustice?
- What do you think motivates those who you believe act against you?
- To what do you think they are entitled and how would you describe them?



Example criteria-based operational definitions

Levels: BAI-3	Dehumanization of identified targets of injustice
LOW	Subject has not identified SPECIFIC PERSON(S) OR GROUP(S) ASSOCIATED WITH ANY perceived injustice or grievance AND THERE IS no indication of dehumanization of any human targets.
MODERATE	Subject has identified some SPECIFIC PERSON(S) OR GROUPS(S) ASSOCIATED WITH AN injustice AND expresses negative opinions of them but expresses some moral constraints on VIOLENCE AND THERE ARE NO INDICATIONS OF DE-HUMANIZATION. .
HIGH	Subject has dehumanized SPECIFIC PERSONS OR GROUPS BY attributing bestial or other NON-HUMAN characteristics, and/or considers him/her/them not human in some way, and/or less deserving of life.



VERA-2R: benefits

- ❑ Provides insight through **analysis** and **restructuring** of the available information
- ❑ Clarifies what **information is missing** and should be obtained from other sources
- ❑ Provides insight into different **profiles** (e.g. ideologically hardened/ influenceable follower/ (criminal) opportunistic,...)
- ❑ Makes it possible to identify **risk trajectories/pathways** (indicators are dynamic): importance of repeated judgements!!
- ❑ Makes it possible to make **scenarioplannings** and this in an informed, founded manner
- ❑ Clarifies which **management strategies** should be applied in function of the identified risk and protective factors



VERA-2R: limitations

- ❑ Result is a professional judgement, not a silver bullet
- ❑ Uncertainty in terrorism : unpredictable triggers (personal, local, global), changes in strategy, modus operandi, ...
- ❑ Caution: deception, lying in personal contact and in behavior (cfr. “How to survive in the West, A Mujahid Guide”)
- ❑ Incarceration makes certain risk factors less visible (more difficult to assess)
- ❑ Detailed and time-consuming



VERA-2R: recommendations for use

1. Multi-agency: chain use
2. Multidisciplinary
3. Importance of consensus judgement
4. (International) research



Thank you for your attention

Further questions?

Astrid.Boelaert@just.fgov.be

Nico.Braspenning2@just.fgov.be

