IMPLEMENTING EVIDENCE-BASED RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN FLEMISH PROBATION AND PAROLE SERVICES: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Prof. Kasia Uzieblo

(Vrije Universiteit Brussel, The Forensic Care Specialists)

Anna Vansteenkiste, Hanne Willemen, Prof. Lars Breuls, & Prof. Kristof Verfaillie

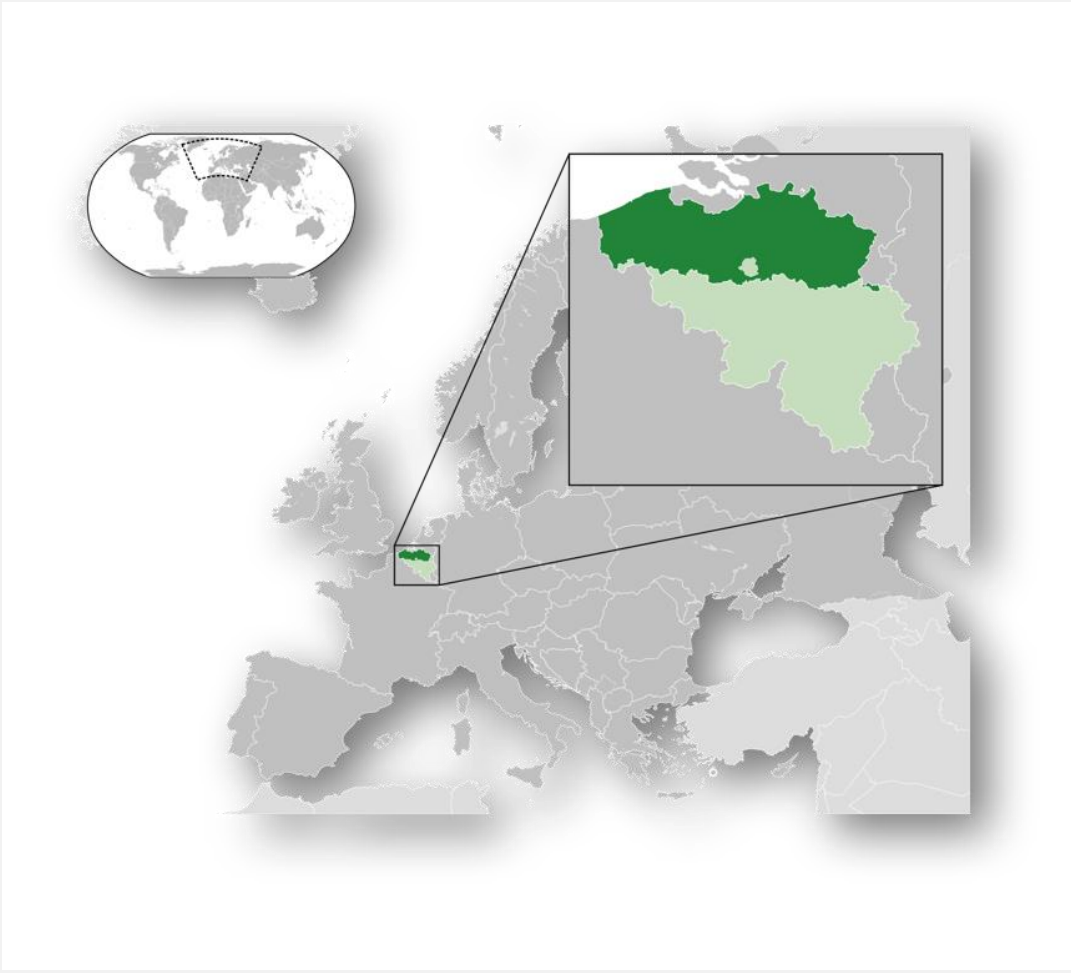
(Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

THE ASSIGNMENT

- Flemish Minister of Justice: Policy Paper 2019-2024

- Goals
  - Improving assessment of risk
  - ↑ Evidence-based reduction of recidivism
  - Within Flemish probation services

- Implementation of risk assessment and management (research project VLOV167 2022 - 2023) funded by Flemish Minister of Justice and Enforcement

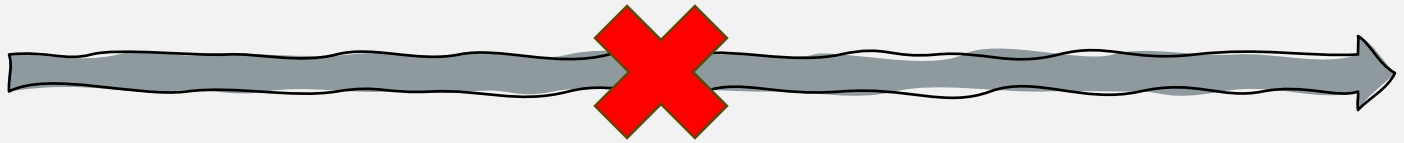


THE FRAMEWORK

- Risk-Need-Responsivity Model (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Bonta & Andrews, 2023)
  - Risk: Risk assessment & matching (who)
  - Need: Needs assessment & targeting of criminogenic needs (what)
  - Responsivity: Most effective approaches to facilitate change? (how)

- Rationale:
  - Evidence-based framework
  - Applied in various prisons, forensic mental health services, probation services

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS



CHALLENGES

Which risk assessment tools to use?

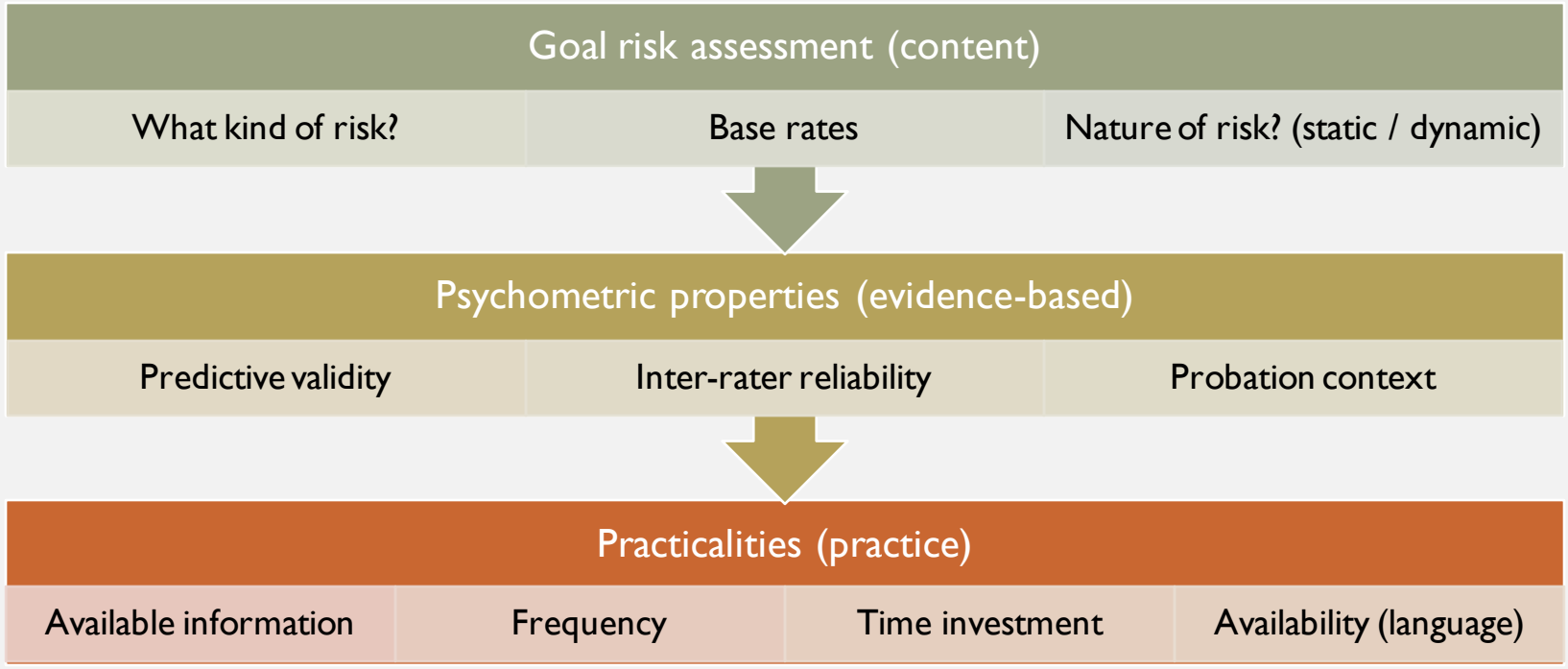
Which cases to assess?

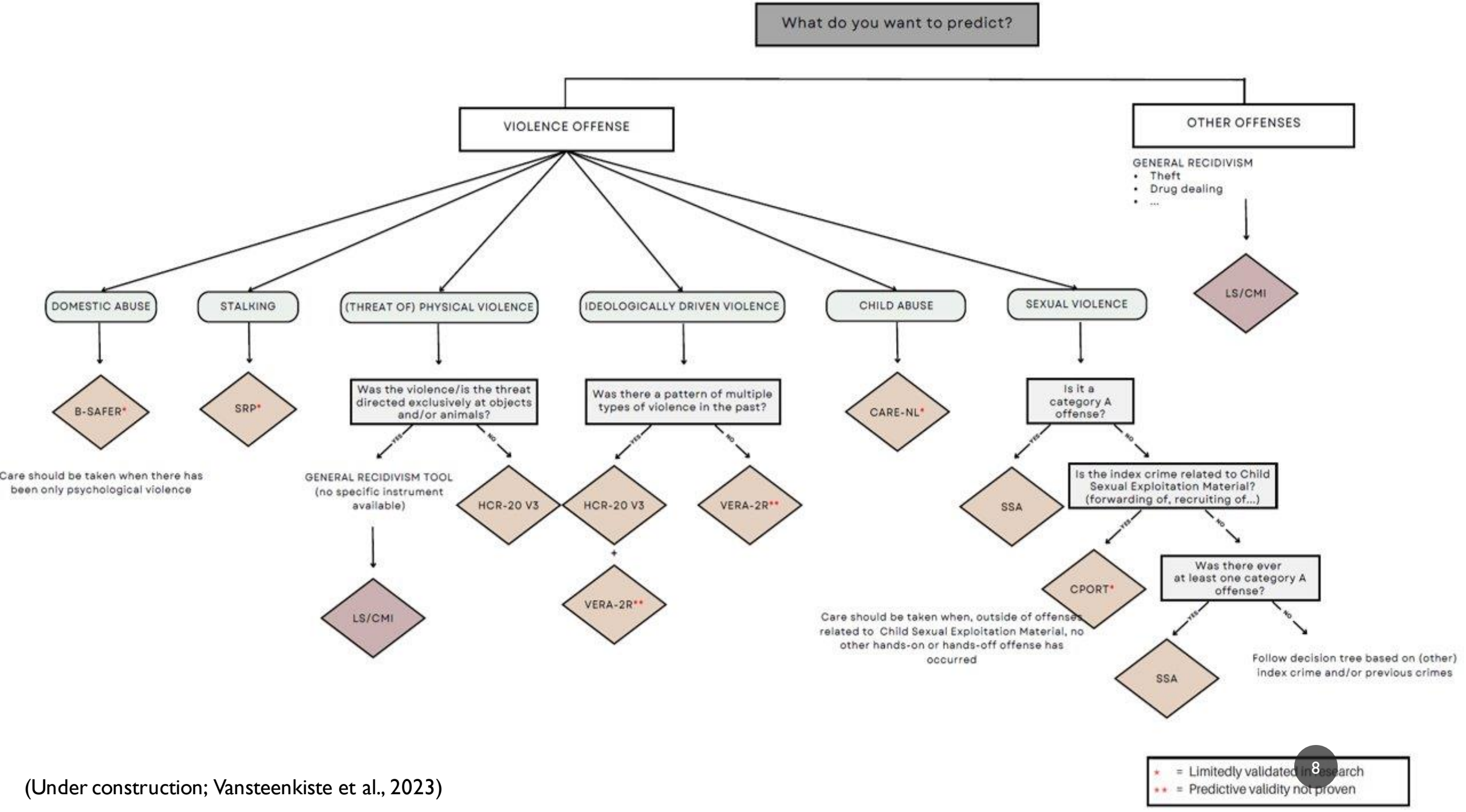
How to align risk management with risk assessment outcomes?

WHICH RISK ASSESSMENT TOOLS?

- > 200 risk assessment tools (Singh et al., 2016)
- Various professionals (e.g., probation officers, nurses, psychiatrists, police, psychologists, …) in min. 40 countries (Singh et al., 2014)
- But no single instrument predictive of all forms of recidivism (e.g., sexual offending, violent offending, partner violence, stalking, …) across different settings
- But no evidence-based guidelines
- Hence, 🛠 decision tree of selected risk assessment tools

WHICH RISK ASSESSMENT TOOLS?





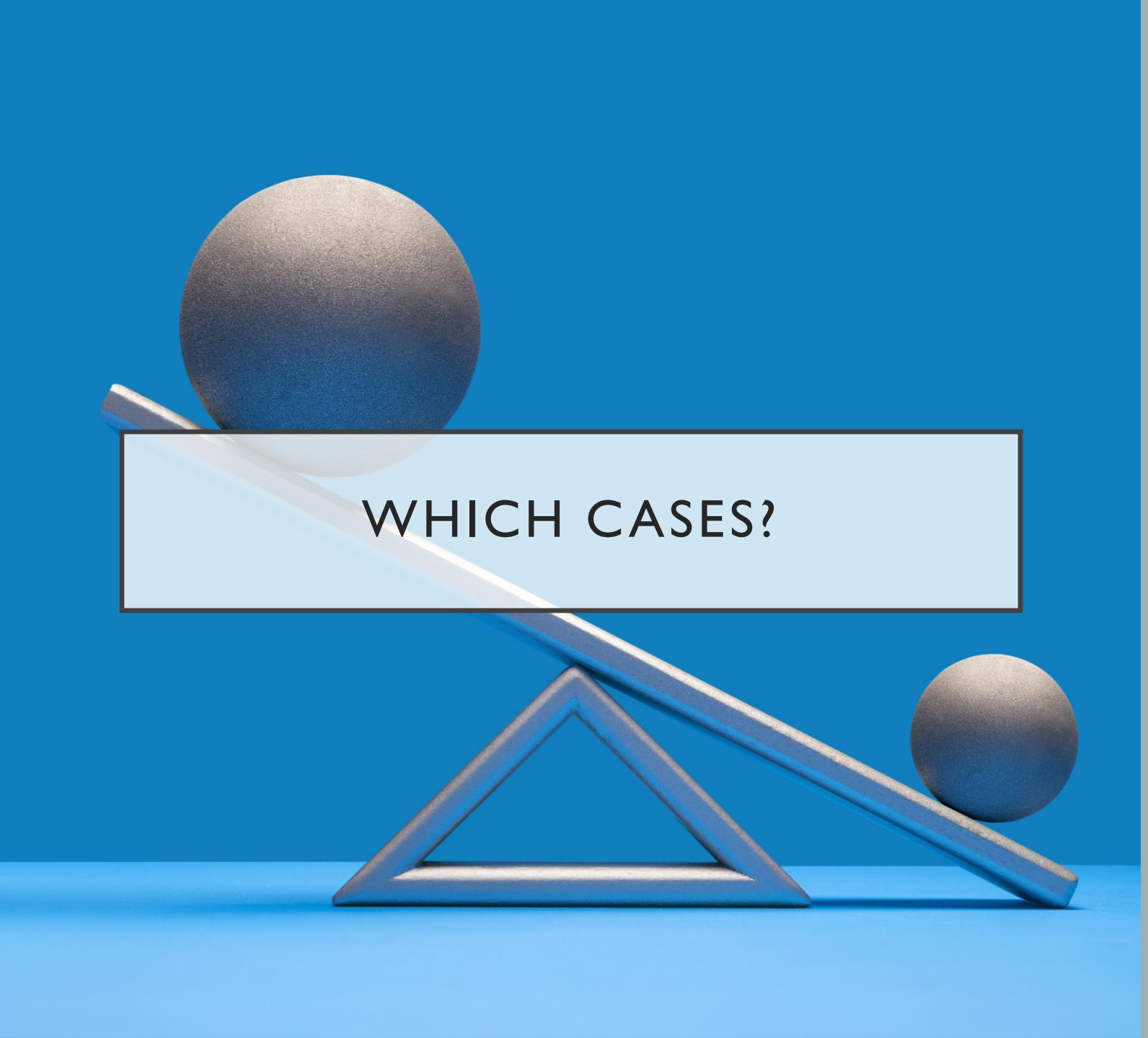
(Under construction; Vansteenkiste et al., 2023)

CHALLENGE #2: WHICH CASE?

Which risk assessment tools?

Which cases?

How to align risk management with risk assessment outcomes?



WHICH CASES?

- Number of cases

  e.g., new cases in 2022:

  #4958 in 2022

  #361 sexual offences

  #2144 violent offences

- Current cases: #11.700

- Risk assessment team: 10 psychologists

WHICH CASES?

- How to choose?
  - No evidence-base: Pragmatic/policy choice
  - Sexual offences: moderate to high risk scores on STATIC-99R
  - (Near) future: violent offences

- Goal? Risk management!
  - E.g., probation: advice and guidance

CHALLENGE #3: RISK MANAGEMENT?

Which risk assessment tools?

Which cases?

How to align risk management with risk assessment outcomes?

HOW TO TRANSLATE OUTCOMES INTO SPECIFIC RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES?

"… predicting if someone will reoffend, in and of itself, has little value if nothing is done to manage risk. In fact, according to some authors, assessing risk without making efforts to manage it is "harmful and unethical"

(Viljoen et al., 2018, p. 182)

HOW TO TRANSLATE OUTCOMES INTO SPECIFIC RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES?

- No evidence-based guidelines, but many obstacles (Viljoen et al., 2018)

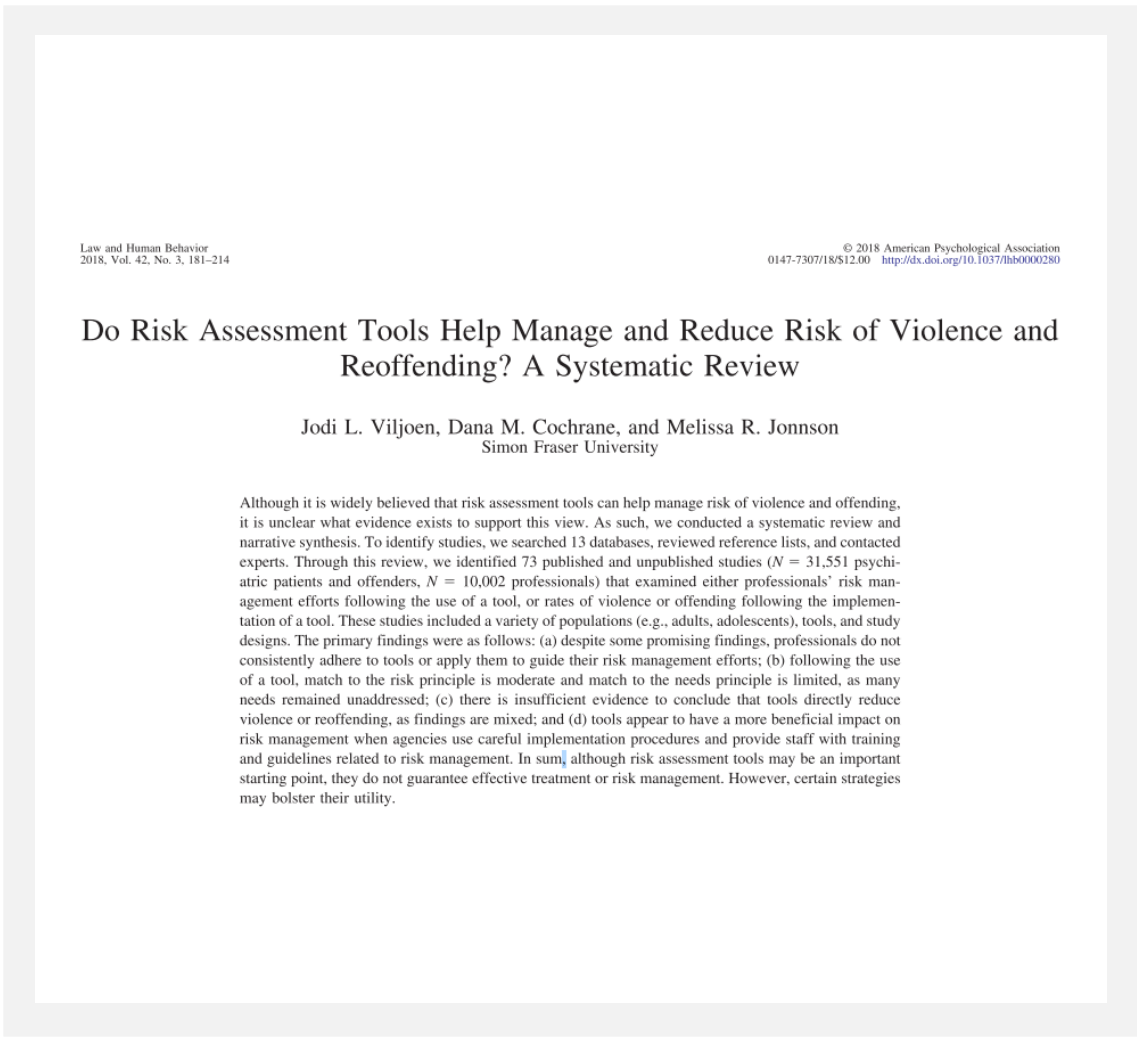
(1) Professionals do not consistently adhere to tools or apply them;

(2) Professionals do not consistently adhere to the risk and need principles;

(3) There is insufficient evidence to conclude that tools directly reduce violence or reoffending, as findings are mixed; but,

(4) Tools appear to have a more beneficial impact on risk management *when* agencies use careful implementation procedures and provide staff with training and guidelines related to risk management.

- Do not assume "It will happen naturally."



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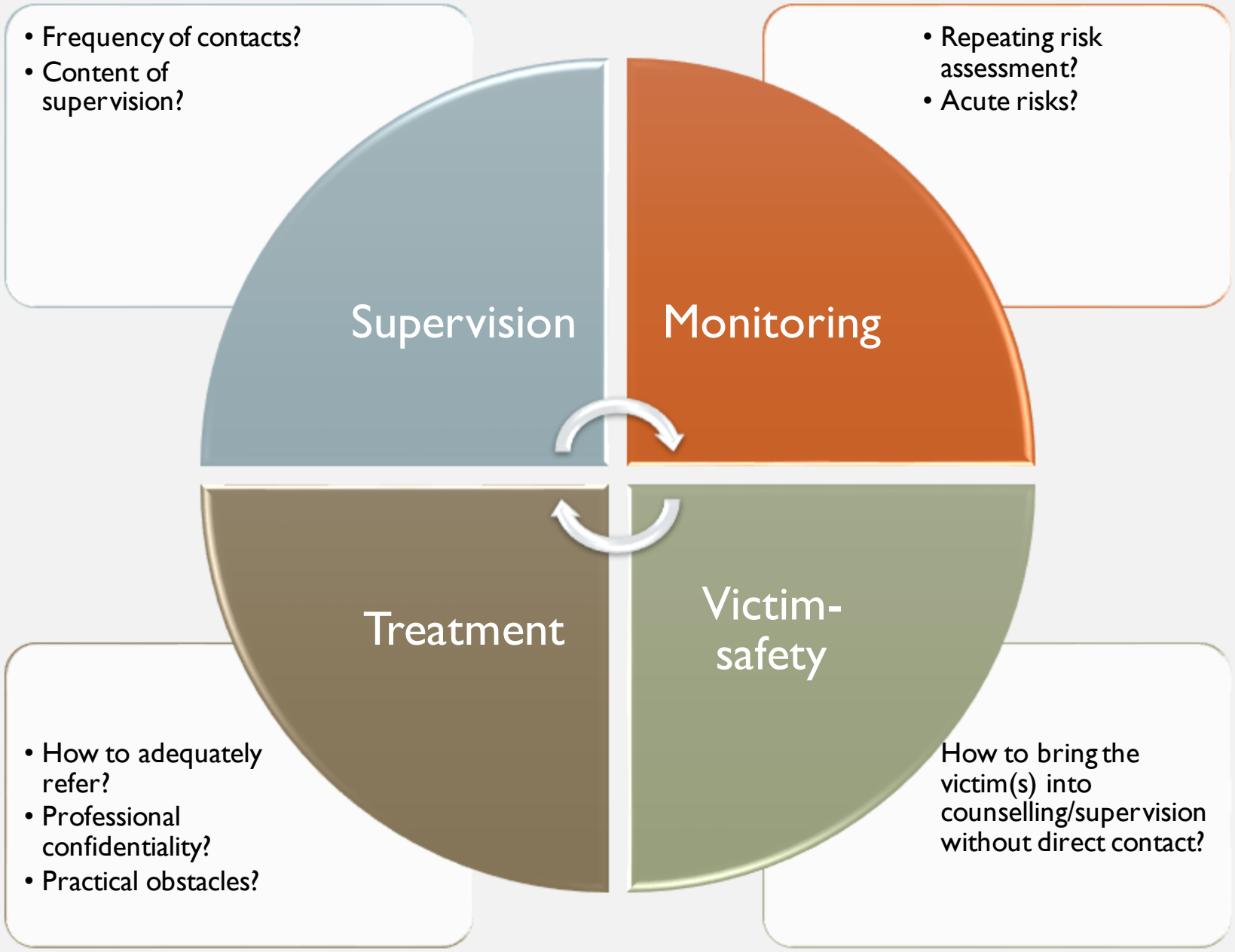
Do Risk Assessment Tools Help Manage and Reduce Risk of Violence and Reoffending? A Systematic Review

Jodi L. Viljoen, Dana M. Cochrane, and Melissa R. Jonnson
Simon Fraser University

Although it is widely believed that risk assessment tools can help manage risk of violence and offending, it is unclear what evidence exists to support this view. As such, we conducted a systematic review and narrative synthesis. To identify studies, we searched 13 databases, reviewed reference lists, and contacted experts. Through this review, we identified 73 published and unpublished studies (N = 31,551 psychiatric patients and offenders, N = 10,002 professionals) that examined either professionals' risk management efforts following the use of a tool, or rates of violence or offending following the implementation of a tool. These studies included a variety of populations (e.g., adults, adolescents), tools, and study designs. The primary findings were as follows: (a) despite some promising findings, professionals do not consistently adhere to tools or apply them to guide their risk management efforts; (b) following the use of a tool, match to the risk principle is moderate and match to the needs principle is limited, as many needs remained unaddressed; (c) there is insufficient evidence to conclude that tools directly reduce violence or reoffending, as findings are mixed; and (d) tools appear to have a more beneficial impact on risk management when agencies use careful implementation procedures and provide staff with training and guidelines related to risk management. In sum, although risk assessment tools may be an important starting point, they do not guarantee effective treatment or risk management. However, certain strategies may bolster their utility.

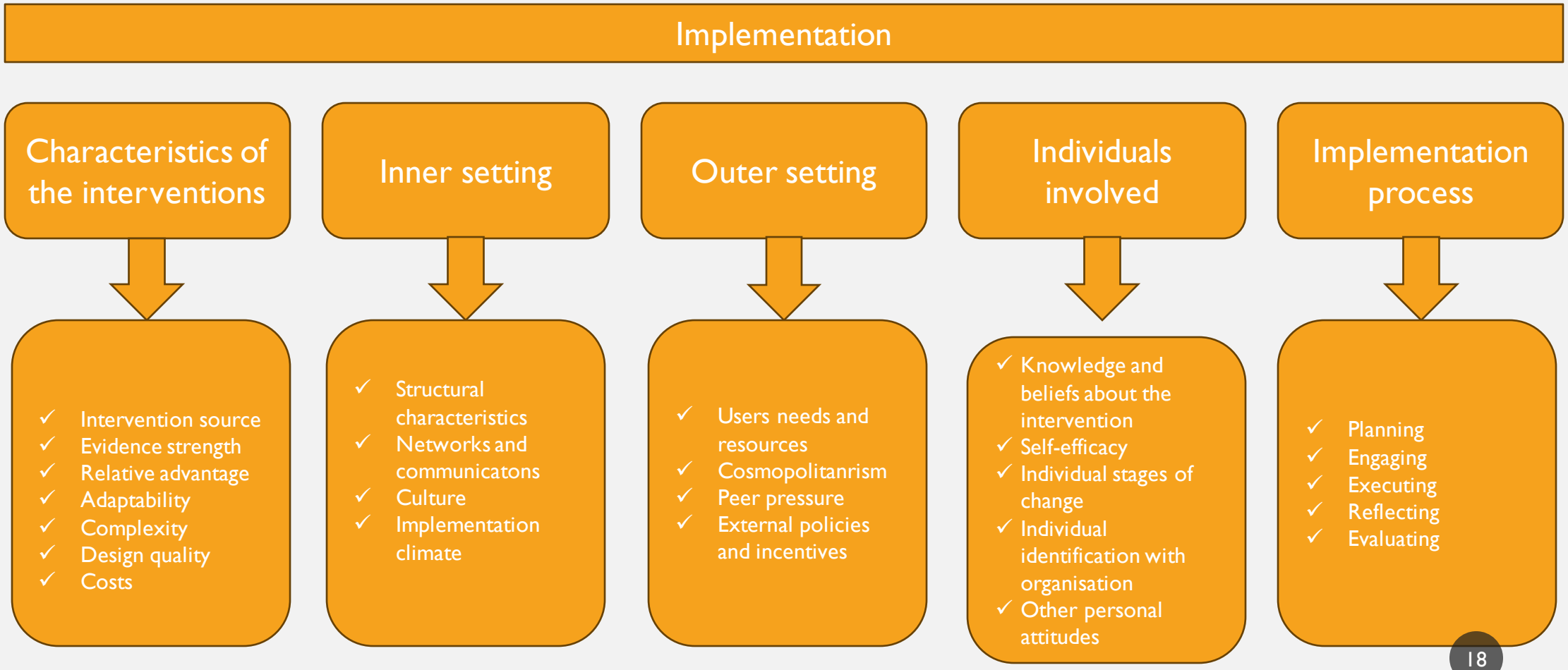
Supervision
Monitoring
Treatment
Victim-safety


• Frequency of contacts?
• Content of supervision?
• Repeating risk assessment?
• Acute risks?
Supervision
Monitoring
Treatment
Victim-safety
• How to adequately refer?
• Professional confidentiality?
• Practical obstacles?
How to bring the victim(s) into counselling/supervision without direct contact?

TAKE-HOME MESSAGES

- Use a theoretical framework on implementation (e.g., Moullin et al., 2020)

THE CONSOLIDATED FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH (CIFR)



(Damschroder et al., 2009)

TAKE-HOME MESSAGES

- Use a theoretical framework on implementation (e.g., Moullin et al., 2020)
- Involve practice from the start: ° evidence- and practice-based frameworks
- Start small and supervise closely: e.g., a testcase
- Communication with all relevant parties (e.g., probation officers, technical department, directors, coordinators, policy makers, …) is the key (e.g., information sharing, training, lectures, ...)
- Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate & improve

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!

Anna Vansteenkiste

Hanne Willemen

Prof. Lars Breuls

Prof. Kristof Verfaillie

Contact: Katarzyna.Uzieblo@vub.be