

The Criminal Court Assessment Tool (CCAT)

Introduction

What is the CCAT?

The CCAT is a set of risk-needs assessment tools that predict an individual’s risk of re-offending, while also screening for important needs that should be targeted to reduce risk, including education, employment, housing, substance use, criminal thinking, mental illness, and trauma. The Center for Court Innovation, with support from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, developed the CCAT to fill a gap in existing risk assessment tools, many of which have been designed primarily to screen for risk based on static factors, such as criminal history, or are too lengthy to administer in a high-volume setting (i.e., pre-arraignment). In contrast, the CCAT, which is rooted in Risk-Need-Responsivity (“RNR”) theory and based on a combination of static criminal history and dynamic needs factors, is designed both to predict risk of re-offense and to offer preliminary guidance on how to reduce that risk through targeted treatment and intervention. The CCAT-Short Screener (“CCAT-S”), which is the focus of this document, is designed to be used in high-volume court settings and can be completed in 15 minutes.

Overview of Instructions for Use

The CCAT-S is in the public domain and is available on paper at this time. Limited training and technical assistance on the CCAT-S can be provided by the Center for Court Innovation. Specifically, the CCAT-S consists of ten administrative items that are used solely for defendant tracking purposes, followed by 25 core items that make up the risk and needs assessment.

- The first seven items of Section I are based on a review of official criminal records and contribute to an overall risk score but do not concern the underlying needs of the defendant.
- The next 18 items (Sections II and III) contribute both to the overall risk score *and* to an understanding of important criminogenic needs.
- The final five items are used exclusively to understand clinical needs in the trauma and mental health domains that may warrant further assessment or referral. They do not contribute to the risk score.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the theoretical basis of risk-needs assessment?

The Center for Court Innovation’s work on risk-need assessment is grounded in the RNR model, an approach to crime prevention that is rooted in behavioral psychology and supported by more than

three decades of empirical research. The RNR model holds that interventions with criminal offenders should adhere to three principles: (1) Risk Principle: A focus on individuals who are at a comparatively higher risk for re-offense; (2) Need Principle: The assessment and treatment of the specific “criminogenic” needs that are directly fueling criminal behavior; and (3) Responsivity Principle: The use of evidence-based therapeutic models (for example, cognitive behavioral approaches) that are responsive to the strengths (e.g., motivations for change) and challenges (e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder) commonly found in chronic offending populations.

What type of offender population is appropriate for the CCAT-S?

The CCAT-S was designed for misdemeanants, but also can be applied to felony and mixed charge populations. The CCAT-S is not specifically designed for special populations (domestic violence, sex, or juvenile offenders, etc.) in that it does not specifically predict the risk of new sex or domestic violence offenses and may need to be re-validated prior to use with juveniles.

What types of agencies can administer the CCAT-S?

The CCAT-S may be administered by a wide variety of justice agencies, including prosecutors and defenders offices, traditional courts, community and other problem-solving courts, and law enforcement, probation, and pretrial service agencies.

When is it appropriate to administer the CCAT-S?

Agencies can make use of a validated risk-needs assessment tool as early as possible in case processing. The CCAT-S may be administered at the pre-booking, pre-arraignment, post-arraignment/pre-trial, and post-diversionary referral stages, and may also be used in other post-conviction programs. Its findings may be used to craft diversion programs or alternative-to-incarceration sentences, provide referrals to treatment, construct profiles of the defendant population for the purposes of evidence-based program planning, and to inform pretrial release decisions.

Who can administer the CCAT-S?

The CCAT-S was designed to be administered by a wide variety of staff, including probation officers, case managers and social workers, pretrial services officers, and even interns. You do not need clinical or legal expertise to administer the CCAT-S, but the assessment can only be used by individuals with access to official criminal records. Tools should always be administered after sufficient staff training, although training requirements for the CCAT-S are comparatively minimal.

Is the CCAT-S “validated?”

A validated risk assessment instrument is one whose raw scores and risk categories have been shown to predict the outcome of interest, typically general re-arrest but sometimes failure to appear or violent re-offense. In its current iteration, the CCAT-S has been validated to predict general re-arrest on a sample of 900 misdemeanor offenders. With respect to general re-offense, the CCAT-S has been found to have an AUC of .784 which reflects “good” predictive capacity by

industry standards. A second validation study of the CCAT-S will be conducted in the fall of 2016 on a mixed sample of felony and misdemeanor offenders.

What type of risk does the CCAT-S assess for?

Not all risk assessments screen for the same category of risk. The CCAT-S was originally designed to assess for risk of general re-offending. The CCAT-S can be modified to predict general re-offense, violent re-offense or failure to appear. The CCAT-S will place defendants in one of five categories, from minimal to high risk. In keeping with RNR theory, low and minimal risk individuals should be “off-ramped” with little to no intervention, while moderate and high risk individuals should be the recipients of more intensive therapeutic social service and supervision resources.

Can the CCAT-S be changed or modified?

Ideally, risk-needs tools should be responsive to the local population (tools that are specific to the assessed offender population are more likely to accurately predict risk). Specific items or domains can be added to the CCAT-S in consultation with Center for Court Innovation staff in order to better inform local decision making, but it is not recommended that items be removed from the CCAT-S due to the possibility of the risk score becoming invalid.

For further questions, please contact Sarah Fritsche, Deputy Director of Research-Practice Strategies and Associate Director of Research, at 646-386-5911 or fritsches@courtinnovation.org.



*The Center has taken steps to ensure that this is non-proprietary tool that may be used at no cost. However, in order for us to best track the use and impact of this tool in the public domain, we ask that you **please not distribute the tool**, but instead refer those interested to Michela Lowry at 646-386-4462 or lowrym@courtinnovation.org. We appreciate your support in these efforts.*