

UNIVERSITY OF  
**NORTHERN COLORADO**

**Colorado Pretrial Risk Assessment Validation Project: Phase II Preliminary Summary**

Victoria Terranova, PhD and Kyle Ward, PhD

Phase 2 of the Colorado Pretrial Assessment Tool (CPAT) Validation Study involved a qualitative assessment of the implementation of the tool. This included both the interview and investigation processes of new arrestees. The following summarizes the methodology and preliminary findings from this qualitative assessment.

Methodology

Focus groups were conducted in six of the seven participating counties including: Boulder, Denver, Larimer, Mesa, Pueblo and Weld. Participants for the focus groups were recruited from a preliminary survey disseminated in Phase 1. A total of 14 focus groups were held between May 10, 2018 and June 30, 2018. There were two categories of focus group participants: 1) pretrial officers, and 2) high-level criminal justice stakeholders that used risk assessment tools to inform decision-making and bail bond arguments (i.e., judges, prosecutors, public defenders, and other criminal justice administrators). In total, there were 41 pretrial officers and 68 stakeholders that participated in the focus groups.

A semi-structured interview guide was used for the focus groups. The questions pertained to how the participants perceived the CPAT in its current state, as well as the utility of the tool for their job duties. Other questions were asked about perceptions of buy-in of the tool, training, and how their perceptions would be impacted if certain modifications to the tool were made. A thematic content analysis was employed on transcriptions of the focus groups. Five preliminary themes were identified from thematic analysis.

**Preliminary themes:**

1) *Role of pretrial risk assessment*

Pretrial officers and stakeholders perceived the risk assessment tool to have value in the pretrial process. Since these participants have different roles, the value of risk assessment is different to each of their decision-making processes.

2) *How the tool is used*

Primarily, pretrial risk assessment is perceived as most useful for informing decisions about pretrial release. Although pretrial risk assessment was perceived as useful, additional factors beyond the tool were also referenced as important considerations.

3) *Consideration of other factors, independent of the risk assessment*

A variety of considerations were cited by participants as relevant to pretrial decision-making that were independent of pretrial risk assessment. Some of these factors include: history of failure to appear of a defendant to court, arrest type, and factors representative of a pretrial defendant's community stability.

4) *Pretrial supervision decisions*

It was reported by pretrial decision-makers that bond release and supervision condition decisions are often made at the same time. Pretrial risk assessment scores were perceived to be useful for informing both of these steps in the pretrial process.

5) *Training and Education*

Both types of focus group participants, pretrial officers and the pretrial stakeholders perceived on-going training and education about the tool to be important. Pretrial officers reported receiving a greater amount of training and education than pretrial stakeholders. Pretrial stakeholders reported a need for enhancing the current amount of training and education they receive on pretrial risk assessment.