ESTER: Introducing a fourth generation risk-need assessment instrument for youth with or at risk for conduct problems

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What is ESTER?

- ESTER is an assessment system that includes
  1. a screening system (ESTER-screening)
  2. a structured research-based professional risk-need instrument (ESTER-assessment).
   - An easy-to-use computerized system that helps visualize and interpret assessments.
- Aims to facilitate assessment and follow-up assessments of risk and protective factors for conduct problems among youths (0-18 years) with or at risk for conduct problems.
  - Thus, for use in both preventive and treating settings
Developed by researchers in collaboration with practice

- Developed by the researchers Henrik Andershed & Anna-Karin Andershed
- Comments and suggestions from
  - Practitioners in various youth-related organizations
  - Professors in the field
- Has been formed together with practice via practical testing
  - Pilot version (October 2007) – Practical testing - revisions
  - Version 1 (April 2008) – Practical testing - revisions
  - Version 2 (October 2008) -> Practical and scientific testing
  - Now widely spread in Sweden

### The ESTER system

- **ESTER-manual**
  - Explains use and the research behind the risk and protective factors that are assessed
- **ESTER-screening**
  - Short questionnaire to screen for strengths and difficulties – Main focus on risk factors
- **ESTER-assessment**
  - Professional structured assessment of risk and protective factors for conduct problems among youths (0-18 years) with or at risk for conduct problems
  - A support for decisions concerning interventions
    - Easy-to-use computerized system
Can be used by all professions and organizations and to improve collaboration

- ESTER can be used by professionals working with assessment and interventions of youths with or at risk for conduct problems.
  - E.g., intake assessment and follow-ups
- Can be used by all organizations that work with youths
  - E.g., preschool, school, social service, child and adolescent psychiatry, juvenile justice institutions, etc
- Uses a neutral behavior-focused language that can be accepted by all professions
  - Can improve collaboration between organizations
- The computerized system is designed to facilitate collaboration
- No previous education or specific background is needed to use ESTER. A one-day training is required.

Developed for practice

- ESTER is developed for practice
  - Should be easy to use and not too comprehensive
  - Not focused on ALL known risk and protective factors
    - Focus on the most practically useful factors
Assesses the most practically useful research based risk and protective factors

- ESTER-assessment focuses on 19 factors that are:
  - Dynamic and potentially changeable via intervention.
  - Directly rather than indirectly related to the youth’s risk for conduct problems.

### Risk factors assessed in ESTER-assessment

#### Youth risk factors

1. Defiant behavior; anger or hardness.
   - Definition: Defies parents and others wishes and demands – is disobedient; or easily becomes very angry and irritated. Seems fearless or doing risky and dangerous things.
2. Distraction, impulsiveness or concentration difficulties.
   - Definition: Is very physically active and restless. Is impulsive and has difficulties to wait for his/her turn and to think before he/she does something. Has difficulties to retain attention and to concentrate for longer times.
3. Difficulties with empathy, feelings of guilt or regret.
   - Definition: Has difficulties with empathy or doesn’t care about others or what they feel and think. Doesn’t seem to feel guilt and regret when he/she has done something wrong or hurt someone.
4. Insufficient verbal abilities or school performance.
   - Definition: Has difficulties with speech, reading- or writing abilities. Insufficient school performances.
5. Negative problem solving, interpretations or attitudes.
   - Definition: Uses negative destructive behavior/problem solving strategies to solve different situations or has a negative way to interpreting others behavior and purposes.
6. Expressive negative antisocial and status focused materialistic attitudes and values.
7. Depressive mood or self harming behavior.
   - Definition: Is sad, depressed or has a self harming behavior.
8. Conduct problems.
   - Definition: Breaks norms, rules or laws in an aggressive or non-aggressive way.
9. Alcohol or drug abuse.
   - Definition: Uses alcohol for intoxication purposes or uses other drugs.
10. Problematic peer relations.
    - Definition: Has difficulties to keep, or is not interested in relations with prosocial peers. Spends time with peers with conduct problem behavior or attitudes, or who uses alcohol or other drugs.

#### Family risk factors

    - Definition: Parents have economical problems or are sad, depressed. Parent’s often consume a lot of alcohol or have a criminal behavior.
11. Difficulties in parent-youth relations.
    - Definition: Parents are in conflict with or are not engage in the youth. They have difficulties to show love and affection or have difficult to accept and emotional attach to the youth.
    - Definition: Parents doesn’t strongly consistent non-desired behavior or have little knowledge about the youth’s behaviour and activities. They have difficulties in their reactions to the youth’s behavior or use harsh discipline towards the youth.
Protective factors assessed in ESTER-assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth protective factors</th>
<th>Family protective factors</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>13. Positive school attachment and performance.</strong>&lt;br&gt;Definition: Has a positive attachment to school and the school work and enjoys school work and as well as school peers and teachers. Performs at least on an average level in all subjects.</td>
<td><strong>17. Parents energy, engagement and support.</strong>&lt;br&gt;Definition: Parents have a lot of time and energy to engage in the youth’s life or are generally interested and engage in the youth’s life. They have support from other people or have the ability to use the support the society offers.</td>
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<td><strong>14. Positive attitudes and problem solving strategies.</strong>&lt;br&gt;Definition: Has positive and constructive ways of solving problems and stress/spressed situations.</td>
<td><strong>18. Parents positive attitudes and parenting strategies.</strong>&lt;br&gt;Definition: Parents are clear with the youth in their attitudes against conduct problem behavior and drugs, and encourage positive activities. They are very consistent in their reactions to the youth’s behavior or know much about the youth’s life and activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15. Positive relations and activities.</strong>&lt;br&gt;Definition: Has positive and prosocial peer relations and supports. Participate regularly in structured activities or spend a lot of free time in positive and norm-breaking activities.</td>
<td><strong>19. Parents awareness and motivation.</strong>&lt;br&gt;Definition: Parents know and seem aware of the youth’s problems and possibly their own problems, which can affect the youth’s behavior. Parents are motivated to change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>16. The youth’s awareness and motivation.</strong>&lt;br&gt;Definition: Is aware of his/her own problematic behavior or is motivated to change.</td>
<td><strong>Explicitly developed for repeated assessments</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- **Made for repeated measures**
  - Should facilitate repeated-measurement-thinking
    - Get more people in practice to do “before-and-after-intervention” assessments.
  - One can conduct an unlimited number of follow-up assessments with ESTER
  - Meaningful changes should be detected
    - ESTER-assessment uses a five-point response scale
  - The computerized system makes the changes of risk and protective factors over time easy to follow
A specific period back in time is assessed

- In ESTER-assessment a period ranging from 1 to 36 months back in time can be assessed in the particular assessment.
  - The professional conducting the assessment makes this decision before the assessment is started.
- Follow-up assessments can be done as often as once a month if needed.

Involves structured documentation of planned and performed interventions

- The professional can in a structured way document planned and performed interventions
  - E.g., what is being done, goals, which risk and protective factors are focused, who will be involved, etc.
ESTER-assessment

- Professional structured risk-need assessment instrument
- 19 risk and protective factors
- Fourth-generation risk-need assessment instrument
  (see Andrews et al., 2006 concerning the generations):
  - It is structured, research based, and explicitly developed to be used from first assessment/intake to case closure
  - Support for decisions for interventions rather than an actuarial instrument
  - Use of the assessment for preventive/intervening purposes rather than prediction

ESTER-assessment (cont.)

- An "ESTER-assessment book" is used for each assessment:
  - Background
  - Information base
  - Rating of the 19 risk and protective factors
  - Planned interventions
  - Performed interventions
  - Follow-up analysis
Multiple informants (e.g., parents, teachers, the youth) and types of information (e.g., files, interviews, etc) should be used to rate the 19 factors.

Total mean time appr. 4-8 hours to conduct.

Made for follow-up assessments (must not do follow-up assessment).

Easy-to-use computerized system.

### 2. Overactivity, impulsiveness or concentration difficulties

**Definition:** Is very physically active and restless. Is impulsive and has difficulties to wait for his/her turn and think before he/she does something. Also difficulty to resist temptation and to concentrate for longer times.

**WHICH BEHAVIORS?**

Have any of the behaviors below occurred during the period in question? Mark occurrence descriptions with a check.

- Overactivity
  - Tackles, climbs or runs around constantly or cannot sit still — stands in situations where sitting still is demanded.
- Impulsivity
  - Seems to do or say things without thinking or has difficulties to wait for his/her turn.
- Concentration difficulty
  - Has difficulty to concentrate longer times or to keep attention on what is supposed to be in focus.
- Other
  - Other observed behaviors which are consistent with the definition of “overactivity, impulsiveness or concentration difficulties” (specific).

**HOW PRONOUNCED?**

How frequent or problematic has this been during the period in question? Make a numerical judgment.

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<tr>
<td>The information is insufficient concerning all these behaviors during the period in question.</td>
<td>None of the above behaviors have occurred during the period.</td>
<td>Does not occur / or is only occurring very rarely, no problems for the youth in his/her surroundings.</td>
<td>Occurs pretty often or is causing problems for the youth in his/her surroundings.</td>
<td>Occurs often or is causing problems for the youth in his/her surroundings.</td>
<td>Occurs very often or is causing extreme problems for the youth or in his/her surroundings.</td>
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</table>
Rating of the risk factor’s frequency and problem-level

**HOW PRONOUNCED?**
How frequent or problematic has this been during the period in question?  
Make a summarized judgement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X Not known</th>
<th>0 Not present</th>
<th>1 Weak</th>
<th>2 Evident</th>
<th>3 Pronounced</th>
<th>4 Very pronounced</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information is insufficient concerning all these behaviors during the period in question.</td>
<td>None of the above behaviors have occurred during the period.</td>
<td>Does not occur often or is only causing very limited problems for the youth or his/her surroundings.</td>
<td>Occurs pretty often or is causing extensive problems to some extent for the youth or his/her surroundings.</td>
<td>Occurs often or is causing extensive problems for the youth or his/her surroundings.</td>
<td>Occurs very often or is causing extensive and serious problems for the youth or his/her surroundings.</td>
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ESTER-screening

- Short screening questionnaire to screen for strengths and difficulties
  - Main focus on risk factors
- **Main purpose:**
  - To screen for youths in need for more detailed assessment/interventions
- **4-pages (appr. 15 minutes)**
- **Versions to:**
  - Parent/guardian
  - Professional (e.g., teacher, treatment staff, etc)
  - The youth (when 10 years or older)
ESTER-screening (cont.)

- Two open-ended questions about perceived strengths and difficulties
- A number of questions with a three-point scale about risk factors of the youth and the family (family part is optional to include)
- One open-ended question about perceived need of help or support

ESTER-screening: Focus on risk factors

-Diagram of ESTER-screening questions and scoring system.
Open-ended questions in ESTER-screening

- **Your child’s strengths and resources?**
  All young people have characteristics or ways of being that are seen as positive or a resource. Which are the most salient strengths you as a parent see in your child?

- **Your child’s weaknesses and difficulties?**
  Many young people have difficulties or ways of being that are seen as negative or as a weakness. Which are the most salient difficulties or weaknesses you as a parent see in your child?

A computerized system

- **An easy-to-use system**
- **Web-based**
  - On secure server, with double-layered pass-word, encryption, etc.
- **Facilitates:**
  - Understanding of the assessment
    - Visualizes the results in an easy-to-understand way
    - I.e., the reports that are produced can be used directly with the parents and the youth
  - Collaboration between colleagues and different organizations
    - Can share and move clients to other uses.
Easy-to-use computerized system

Startpage for Charlie Andersson

Name and contact information
Background

Assessments
Add new assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Started</th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment 1</td>
<td>3/7/00</td>
<td>5/7/00</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment 2</td>
<td>4/7/00</td>
<td>6/9/00</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment 3</td>
<td>5/8/00</td>
<td>5/11/00</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

- Total summary
- Brief summary
- Export to Excel
- Only assessment 1
- Only assessment 2
- Only assessment 3
- Only summary exists

Easy-to-use computerized system (cont.)

- A number of different reports can be produced just by clicking a button
  - The information in “ESTER-assessment book” gained in the assessment is put into the computerized system
  - PDF-reports can then be produced just by clicking
    - All information that have been put into the system comes out in professionally formated PDF-reports
Risk-need profile

All risk and protective factors ratings on one single page

Over-time graphs for all risk and protective factors

2. Overactivity, impulsiveness or concentration difficulties

![Graph](image_url)
Summary graphs – Risk factors

Summary graphs – Protective factors
Research support


Contact

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