

Name of Tool	Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol-18 (TRAP-18)
Category	Violence Risk (Validated)
Author / Publisher	Meloy
Year	2016

Description

- The TRAP-18 is an SPJ tool for assessing individuals who potentially may engage in lone-actor terrorism. It is intended to be used by mental health, intelligence, law enforcement and security professionals to manage operational data on a person of concern and prioritise cases based upon the presence or absence of warning behaviours and characteristics. It is not an actuarial instrument designed to specifically predict acts of lone actor terrorism ([Meloy, 2017](#)).
- It is two-fold in nature consisting of eight proximal warning behaviours (pathway, fixation, identification, novel aggression, energy burst, leakage, directly communicated threat and last resort behaviour) and ten distal characteristics (personal grievance and moral outrage, framed by an ideology, failure to affiliate with extremist or other group, dependence on the virtual community, thwarting of occupational goals, changing in thinking and emotion, failure of sexual intimate pair-bonding, mental disorder, creativity and innovation, history of criminal violence) ([Meloy et al., 2019](#)).
- All the proximal warning behaviours are dynamic and based on patterns of behaviour, whilst several of the distal characteristics (e.g. history of mental disorder) are static risk factors. Although protective factors are not explicitly included, the absence of certain indicators (proximal warning behaviours and distal characteristics) are protective. Further, the narrative questions ask about the presence of protective factors in individual cases ([Meloy, 2019](#)).
- The focus of the TRAP-18 is on patterns of behaviour rather than distinctive variables, i.e. it is not intended to predict who will or will not commit an act of terrorism; rather, the tool can be used to help assign resources by informing on which individuals should receive priority attention. The results generated from using the tool indicate whether a case requires active management (where one or more warning behaviours are present), or monitoring (where only distal characteristics exist) ([Meloy & Genzman, 2016](#); [Meloy, 2018](#); [Meloy, 2019](#)).
- To have the most reliable assessment using the TRAP-18, three sources of data should be used: a direct interview (this may be clinical or non-clinical and may or may not involve psychometric testing); collateral interviews with those who are acquainted with the individual and are aware of their behaviour; and the individual's public records, including law enforcement and national security documents if available. It is recognised, however, that a direct interview may not be feasible, necessary, or wise in certain cases ([Meloy, 2019](#)).

Age Appropriateness

18+

Assessor Qualifications

Mental health, intelligence, law enforcement, and counter-terrorism professionals with caseloads or supervisory responsibilities. Assessors are required to attend the standardised training course lasting 6 – 7 hours in person or online.

Strengths

- An overview of the strengths of the TRAP-18 was compiled by experts in risk assessment. It was noted that basing some of the distal factors on psychoanalytic theory provides a clinical understanding that may inform risk assessment and intervention. As a tool, it also has the potential to contribute to the prioritisation of cases in a pre-crime scenario, as well as formulation, re-formulation and ongoing risk management in a post-crime situation ([Lloyd, 2019](#)).
- The tool can be used regardless of ideology ([Meloy & Gill, 2016](#)).

Empirical Grounding

- The TRAP-18 is underpinned by theoretical and empirical literature on lone-actor terrorism and extremism. Its theoretical underpinnings include theory and research on targeted violence, object relations and attachment theories, gestalt psychology (an attempt to understand meaningful perceptions in a chaotic world system) and psychobiological foundations for predatory violence ([Meloy, 2019](#)).

Inter-Rater Reliability

a) UK Research

No empirical evidence available at present.

b) International Research

- [Meloy et al., \(2015\)](#) investigated the TRAP-18 using a sample of 22 individuals who had committed terrorism in Europe over a period of thirty-five years. Three hundred and ninety six codings were undertaken by two raters who are experts in threat assessment and management. The mean inter-rater reliability was found to be 0.895. The IRR range for items was good to excellent ranging from 0.68 to 1.0 for the warning behaviours and 0.75 to 1.0 for the distal characteristics.

- In a study by [Challacombe & Lucas \(2018\)](#), two raters evaluated the whole sample (n=58) using the TRAP-18. Average Cohen's Kappa was good for proximal characteristics (k=.687) and excellent for distal characteristics (k=.812). The average inter-rater reliability for the entire TRAP-18 was found to be excellent (k=.757).

Validation History

General Predictive Accuracy

a) UK Research

No empirical evidence at present.

b) International Research

- There have been a number of validation studies carried out on the TRAP-18. An examination of the postdictive validity of warning behaviours was first carried out by looking at school shooting case studies. Although not a form of terrorism because school shootings are usually not motivated by political or ideological reasons, these attacks are similarly unpredictable and have the potential to cause mass casualties ([Meloy et al., 2014](#)).

- Another study showed that the TRAP-18 was generalisable across various types of terrorism: jihadists, right-wing extremists and single issue attacks (see [Meloy & Gill, 2016](#) for further details).

- After examining 111 lone-actor terrorist attacks in the United States and Europe, [Meloy & Gill \(2016\)](#) found that the TRAP-18 was able to discriminate between lone-actor terrorists who successfully carried out their attacks compared to those whose attacks were thwarted. The five variables found to be significantly different were fixation, creativity/innovation, failure in sexually intimate pair bonding, pathway and less likely to be dependent upon a virtual community.

- [Böckler et al., \(2015\)](#) used the TRAP-18 to assess the case of the 2011 Frankfurt Airport Attack. Carrying out a qualitative analysis of investigation and court files found that the perpetrator showed six proximal warning behaviours and nine distal characteristics. Tracing the various stages of the individual's life highlighted several triggers towards him drawing upon jihadist ideologies.

- [Challacombe & Lucas \(2018\)](#) applied the TRAP-18 to a series of violent and non-violent incidents involving Sovereign Citizens in the US. Chi-square and binary logistic regression analyses were used to test the ability of the TRAP-18 to predict violent outcomes. The full model was statistically significant ($\chi^2=33.88$), suggesting TRAP-18 was able to distinguish between individual cases that were violent and non-violent.

- [Erlandsson & Meloy \(2018\)](#) assessed the 2015 Swedish school attack in Trollhättan using the TRAP-18. The perpetrator met 7 out of the 8 proximal warning behaviours and 8 out of 10 distal characteristics on the TRAP-18 instrument. Based on these results, the authors

	<p>concluded there is an excellent goodness of fit between this incident and other cases of individual terrorism in Europe and North America.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goodwill & Meloy (2019) used a combined sample of North American terrorist attackers (n=33) and non-attackers (n=23) to plot the potential clustering (co-occurrence) of risk factors. Findings indicated that proximal warning behaviours are present in attackers and largely absent in non-attackers, whilst distal characteristics are evident in both groups. Three of the distal characteristics (<i>personal grievance and moral outrage, ideological framing, and changes in thinking and emotion</i>) cluster with both the proximal warning behaviours and the attackers. This suggests both that these distal factors co-occur more in attackers than non-attackers, and that there is an increased likelihood of finding proximal warning behaviours than any of the remaining seven distal characteristics
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Validation History	
Applicability: Females	<input type="checkbox"/>
a) UK Research	No empirical evidence at present.
b) International Research	No empirical evidence at present.

Validation History	
Applicability: Ethnic Minorities	<input type="checkbox"/>
a) UK Research	No empirical evidence at present.
b) International Research	No empirical evidence at present.

Validation History	
Applicability: Mental Disorders	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
a) UK Research	No empirical evidence at present.
b) International Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fernández García-Andrade et al. (2019) applied the TRAP-18 to 44 patients with severe mental illness, who had a criminal history and were in situations of social exclusion. High predictive validity was demonstrated for the TRAP-18 (AUC=1.00), indicating it could be a useful tool for assessing the risk of terrorist radicalisation in

mentally ill individuals, particularly those with a history of being in prison and living in socially secluded situations.

Contribution to Risk Practice

- Tools like the HCR-20 V3 and WAVR-21 could function as a ‘gateway’ instrument to allow for a more individualised assessment of the behaviours and motivations associated with lone actor terrorism using the TRAP-18 ([Meloy, 2018](#)). [Guldimann & Meloy \(2020\)](#) suggest using other tools such as the HCR-20 V3 in conjunction with the TRAP-18.
- [Meloy et al., \(2019\)](#) coded 2 non-random samples of convenience: 33 cases of a lethal terrorist attack in the United States; 23 individuals who posed a national security concern but did not mount an attack: the latter group were either successfully risk managed for three years, or had no intent to mount an attack. Half of the TRAP-18 indicators were found to be significantly different between the samples with medium to large effect sizes ($\phi=.35-.70$). The three warning behaviours that were not significantly different between the groups were fixation, novel aggression and leakage. Due to its retrospective design, no inferences were made about predictive validity on the basis of this study.
- Looking at a sample of 22 individuals who had committed terrorism in Europe, [Meloy et al. \(2016\)](#) found that ‘content validity’ (the extent to which a measure represents all the facets of a given construct) was evident in 72% of the variables of the TRAP-18.
- In a review of the literature, [Guldimann & Meloy \(2020\)](#) described the inter-rater reliability of the TRAP-18 as excellent, with research showing promise in terms of content, criterion, discriminative, and predictive validity. They found that several of the proximal warning behaviours - pathway, fixation, identification, leakage, energy burst, and last resort – were commonly found in the research, while “directly communicated threat” was not prominent. However, they caution that its absence should not be interpreted to mean that no threat exists.

Other Considerations

- A group of experts reviewed the strengths and limitations of the TRAP-18. Some limitations noted were that:
 - the focus on lone actors potentially limits its utility;
 - a full assessment involving a direct interview, psychometric testing, and complete information sources may not be entirely realistic in a pre-crime scenario; and
 - some of the more psychoanalytic distal factors may be difficult to make sense of without clinical expertise.
- In terms of the strengths of the tool, they noted that:
 - it can be used in risk management and prevention, potentially discriminating between empty and real threats;
 - it can potentially assist with case prioritisation in a pre-crime scenario, in addition to formulation, re-formulation and ongoing risk management in a post-crime situation; and
 - a clinical understanding of subjects relevant to terrorism underpin and inform the tool ([Lloyd, 2019](#)).
- [Brugh et al., \(2020\)](#) applied the TRAP-18 to a sample (n=77) of jihadism-inspired lone actor terrorists in Europe and the US, using only publically available information from the Western Jihadism Project database. Of 18 items, only four were rated Present more often than they were rated Absent or Unknown (Pathway, Identification, Personal Grievance, Framed by Ideology). In comparing the US and European samples, the items Fixation, Energy Burst, Leakage, and

Dependence on the Virtual Community were more common the US sample. The study produced three “false negatives:” three cases were not recommended for Active Risk Management, contrary to expectations for a sample of confirmed lone actor terrorists. The authors conclude that using TRAP-18 with only publically available information raises questions about the tool’s feasibility in this setting. Consideration should also be given to potential difficulties using the TRAP-18 across different geopolitical contexts where there may be differences in how information is gathered and made publicly available.

- The TRAP-18 is owned, copyrighted and trademarked in the United States by Dr Meloy, with distribution and sales licensed to *Multihealth Systems, Inc.* (mhs.com) ([Meloy, 2019](#)).
- Training in the TRAP-18 is available from the *Global Institute of Forensic Research* through their online on demand resources (gifrinc.com). This company is owned by Multihealth Systems.
- Further information about the tool and its author may be found here:
<http://drreidmeloy.com/training/trap-18/>