



Research at a glance

Evidence-Based Review of Gender-Matching in Psychotherapy to Inform Best Practices in Cross-Gender Facilitation of Women Offender's Correctional Programming

KEY WORDS: *Women Offenders, gender matching, treatment practices*

Why we did this study

The purpose of this research was to review empirical literature to inform decision-making concerning whether it is appropriate to employ men as program facilitators for women offender's group programming. This issue contains two distinct components. One issue is whether there are quantifiable differences in a female client's therapeutic gains when working with a male versus female facilitator. The second issue involves the therapeutic process as experienced by women working with male and female facilitators.

What we did

A wide base of literature was searched in preparation for this report. Databases as well as internet and internal documents were reviewed. Experts on female offender literature were contacted to determine if there was unpublished literature on this topic. The review consisted of a number of published articles as well as unpublished reports.

Since no literature was found that examined the impact of male facilitators in women offender's correctional programming, this review presents research completed on gender-matching in the general psychotherapy literature as well as in populations that share characteristics with many incarcerated females, such as a history of sexual victimization and substance abuse.

What we found

One aspect of the therapeutic process known to have an impact on outcome is the working alliance between patient and therapist. However, none of the published studies reviewed here indicated an advantage in terms of working alliance for women working with female therapists.

There is some evidence to suggest that women will experience the process of psychotherapy differently with a female therapist. Others have reported that women experience more distress during self-disclosure to a female therapist. It is not clear that this distress would necessarily lead to negative

outcomes. It could be argued that greater emotional intensity is positive.

Generally, there is little evidence to demonstrate that there are negative effects of matching women to male therapists in terms of either process or outcome. Gender-matching has not been found to predict entering into or remaining in treatment. Nor has it been shown to predict outcome in terms of change in treatment targets.

What it means

Overall, the literature indicated that the gender of the facilitator is not an important factor in the treatment outcome for women. Having a female facilitator deliver programming to female participants is not sufficient for program success. Although gender-matching may be associated with some differences in certain elements of the therapeutic process, there is little to no evidence that these differences will affect outcomes.

For more information

Franklin, A., Rector, B., & Trinneer, A. (2014). *Evidence-Based Review of Gender-Matching in Psychotherapy to Inform Best Practices in Cross-Gender Facilitation of Women Offender's Correctional Programming*. Research Report R288. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

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