

Women Offender Assessment: Can Gender-Informed Variables Improve Prediction?

A gender-informed approach to risk and need assessment using OMS data accurately predicts outcomes for women.

Why we did this study

In recent decades, correctional organizations have begun to recognize the differences between factors related to men and women's involvement in the criminal justice system and their response to interventions and have incorporated this information into the development of treatment approaches for women offenders. Increasingly, gender differences have also been hypothesized to be important in the assessment of risk and needs, with some scholars proposing that there may be factors that are more important for women. The goal of the current study was to examine the feasibility of using existing data from the Correctional Service of Canada's (CSC) Offender Management System (OMS) to develop a gender-informed risk/need assessment tool.

What we did

Women admitted to federal custody for a new warrant of committal between September 28, 2009 to January 8, 2017 who had a subsequent release into the community were included. Women were randomly classified into two groups: (1) those in the development group – used to develop the assessment tool ($n = 646$, 35% Indigenous); (2) those in the validation group – used to validate the assessment tool ($n = 620$, 38% Indigenous). As well, a matched-comparison group of men was used to assess the possible gender differences of the tool ($n = 647$, 36% Indigenous). Small numbers did not allow for the disaggregation of results by Indigenous identity.

The OMS was reviewed to identify both gender-neutral and gender-responsive variables to consider in the development of a gender-informed assessment tool. Then, items were reduced through a combination of descriptive statistics, regression analyses, and principle components analyses.

What we found

Results showed that OMS was able to be used to create a gender-informed risk/need assessment tool that included 22 items in 9 domains: 1) criminal history, 2) drug misuse and unstable accommodation, 3) antisocial personality, 4) employment, 5) alcohol misuse, 6) negative childhood experiences, 7) violence and weapons, 8) support and

resources, and 9) incidents and charges. These items represented both gender-neutral and gender-responsive items. An overall rating categorized women as Low, Medium, or High risk/need.

The gender-informed assessment tool was found to have good predictive accuracy, with individual items and the overall rating being associated with the likelihood of experiencing any return to federal custody. Interestingly, comparable predictive accuracy was found for men.

Ratings included in the gender-informed assessment tool were moderately to strongly related to other established CSC case management tools (e.g., Static Factors Assessment, Dynamic Factors Identification and Analysis-Revised, and the Criminal Risk Index). Further, the gender-informed risk/need ratings incrementally predicted any return to federal custody over existing CSC tools.

What it means

Overall, this research suggests that gender-responsive and gender-neutral risk and need factors provide complementary, not competing, information that contributes to assessing women offenders' risk. Incorporating a holistic approach to offender assessment produced useful information in the prediction of community outcomes and has the potential to improve existing case management tools. Nonetheless, additional research is required to validate this assessment tool on Indigenous women and to further explore hypothesized gender-responsive factors.

For more information

Derksen, D., Wardrop, K., & Wanamaker, K. (2019). *Women offender assessment: Can gender-informed variables improve risk prediction?* (Research Report R-413). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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