

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

Custody Rating Scale (CRS) Validation and Revalidations: 1987-2019

Twenty empirically informed studies have affirmed the predictive validity of the Custody Rating Scale across groups.

Why are we doing this study

In the mid-eighties, the Research Division of the Ministry Secretariat of the then Solicitor General of Canada undertook a review of the security classification literature and set about to develop an objective 'initial' security instrument called the Custody Rating Scale (or "CRS").

By the late eighties, the Research Branch and the Offender Management Division of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) had pilot tested the CRS as an actuarial aid in 'initial' security level (minimum, medium, or maximum) decision-making. Subsequently, the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) of Canada recommended the CRS be implemented service-wide.

In the fall of 1994, the CRS was implemented nation-wide and automated in the Offender Management System as one measure in a systematic, comprehensive and individualized Correctional Planning process. Since that time, several modifications were made to the CRS by giving extra weight to 'severity of current offence' deemed to be extreme (e.g. murder in 2001; terrorism-related offences with a minimum life sentence in 2010). It is important to note that the CRS does not automatically dictate the initial security classification that will be assigned to each new admission. As mandated by the regulations of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, it is based on professional ratings of institutional adjustment, escape risk and public safety risk. Furthermore, psychological risk evaluations as well as other relevant factors (i.e., Indigenous social history) may come into play.

Notwithstanding the longevity of the standard operating practice in administering actuarial tools like the CRS in corrections, various challenges to the validity of application to diverse groups have been raised throughout the years. While applied correctional research might head off some of the criticism, it can also respond by conducting further testing and, if deemed necessary, adjust accordingly.

What we did

Available empirical studies (that provide new data, not opinion) were gathered from 1987 to 2019 on the CRS. Select quotes were extracted from the publications that highlight the main findings.

What we found

As reflected below, a systematic review of the published literature yielded a total of **20** empirically-informed studies.

- 1. Research Division. Ministry Secretariat. (1987). *Development of a Security Classification Model for Canadian Federal Offenders*. Ottawa, Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada.**
"on the basis of statistical analysis of items from these various instruments, we were able to derive a new model that would combine and weight certain factors so as to give us a better estimate of the best placement of inmates."
- 2. Porporino, F., Luciani, F., Motiuk, L., Johnston, M., Mainwaring, B. (1989). *Pilot Implementation of a Custody Rating Scale: Interim Report*. Research Report R-02. Correctional Service Canada.**
"overall concordance of 74.3%" between case management officers' security level recommendation and the Custody Rating Scale"



CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

Custody Rating Scale (CRS) Validation and Revalidations: 1987-2019

3. Johnston, J., & Motiuk, L.L. (1992). **Factors Related to Unlawful Walkaways from Minimum Security Institutions.** Research Report R-23. Correctional Service Canada
“the scoring of the CRS, SIR and CMS validated previous findings regarding the predictive value of objective classification systems. The results from these classification instruments bolster the assertion that the ‘walkaway’ offenders comprised a high risk/high need group.”
4. Johnston, J., & Motiuk, L.L. (1992). **Unlawful Departures from Minimum Security Institutions: A Comparative Investigation.** Research Report R-27. Correctional Service Canada
“when the Custody Rating Scale was applied retrospectively the scores of walkways were significantly higher than those of ‘non-walkaways’.”
5. Report of the Auditor General of Canada (1994) to the House of Commons. Vol. 11. Chapters 16, 17, 18.
“Better use of the Custody Rating Scale could enhance public safety”.
6. Luciani, F., Motiuk, L., & Nafekh, M. (1996). **An Operational Review of the Custody Rating Scale: Reliability, Validity and Practical Validity.** Research Report R-67. Ottawa: Correctional Service Canada.
“tests for convergent and predictive validity remained favourable and no evidence was observed that would prohibit the application of the Scale to female, Aboriginal or sex offenders.”
7. Luciani, F. (1997). **Tried and true: Proof that the Custody Rating Scale is still reliable and valid.** Forum on Corrections Research. Vol. 9, No. 1, 13-17.
“the CRS provides the Correctional Service of Canada with an effective and objective measure of security classification is a valuable resource to management and guides case management staff consistently in initial placement decisions.”
8. Luciani, F. (1998). **Exploring reintegration potential: Impact of initial placement practice.** Forum on Corrections Research. Vol. 10, No. 1, 23-27.
“the scale assigned a higher proportion of offenders to lower security categories than actual initial placement, and was more accurate in predicting incidence of institutional maladjustment and escape from minimum security.”
9. Grant, B., & Luciani, F. (1998). **Security Classification Using the Custody Rating Scale.** Research Report R-67. Correctional Service Canada.
“Overall, the use of the CRS has increased, the concordance rates have improved on most regions and the instrument has been shown to offer a valid means of assigning a security level to offenders”.
10. Smith, P. (2001). **The Effects of Incarceration on Recidivism: A Longitudinal Examination of Program Participation and Institutional Adjustment in Federally Sentenced Adult Male Offenders.** Doctoral Dissertation. University of New Brunswick.
“The CRS developed by CSC is a robust predictor of prison misconducts. The r values were .31 (CI = .29 to .33) and .30 (CI = .25 to .31) for incidents and segregation, respectively.”
11. Luciani, F. (2001). **Initiating Safe Reintegration: A Decade of Custodial Rating Scale Results.** Forum on Corrections Research, 13(1), 8-10.
“the CRS ratings were more accurate than subjective decisions in identifying offenders who would engage in incidents or escape from minimum security”.



CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

Custody Rating Scale (CRS) Validation and Revalidations: 1987-2019

12. Blanchette, K., Verbrugge, P., & Wichmann, C. (2002). *The Custody Rating Scale, Initial Security Level Placement, and Women Offenders*. Research Report R-127. Ottawa: Correctional Service Canada.
“The CRS security designations also demonstrated good predictive validity for both Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal women offenders. There was a clear linear relationship between the CRS security level designation for women offenders and security incident involvement (e.g., substance abuse, escape, assault) within the six-month follow-up.”
13. Blanchette, K., & Motiuk, L.L. (2004). *Taking Down the Straw Man: A Reply to Webster and Doob*. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*. 46(5), 621-630.
“our data have demonstrated, once again, that the CRS is a valid tool for initial security classification of federal women offenders, we are seeking to improve the design and development of gender-specific initial security classification device for women to enhance public, staff and offender safety”.
14. Blanchette, K. (2005). *Field-test of a Gender-informed Security Re-classification Scale for Female Offenders*. Doctoral Dissertation. Carleton University.
“Although the CRS was developed with a sample of male offenders, its reliability, validity, and practical utility have also been assessed favourably within Aboriginal and female offender samples.”
15. Gobeil, R. (2011). *Use of the Custody Rating Scale with Male Offenders*. Research Report R-257. Ottawa: Correctional Service Canada.
“Results were supportive of the continued use of the CRS with Aboriginal offenders”
16. Barnum, G., & Gobeil, R. (2012). *Revalidation of the Custody Rating Scale for Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Offenders*. Research Report R-273. Ottawa: Correctional Service Canada.
“the results of the current study support the continued use of the CRS as a component of the initial security classification process for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women offenders.”
17. Rubinfeld, S. (2014). *An Examination of a Reweighted Custody Rating Scale for Women*. Research Report R-289. Ottawa: Correctional Service Canada.
“Overall, reweighting the CRS items slightly improved the scale for non-Aboriginal women, but had less of an effect for Aboriginal women”.
18. Helmus, L-M., & Forrester, T. (2014). *Construct Validity of the Static Factors Assessment in the Offender Intake Assessment process*. Research Report R-309. Ottawa: Correctional Service Canada.
“Additionally, the SFA risk summary (as well as the subscales) are related to ratings on other risk measures, such as the SIR-R1, SIR-proxy, and the CRS (including its two subscales: Institutional Adjustment and Security Risk). The finding that the OSR was more strongly related to the Security Risk subscale of the CRS than the CHR makes sense given that this subscale of the CRS includes items related to public risk (e.g., offence severity)”.
19. Thompson, J., & Wardrop, K. (2018). *An Assessment of the Reliability and Validity of the Security Reclassification Scale for Women (SRSW)*. Research Report R-412. Ottawa: Correctional Service Canada.
“Indigenous women tended to be younger and were more likely to be convicted of schedule 1 or homicide offences and receive higher initial security classifications according to the CRS”.
20. Bedard, T. (2019). *Offender Assessment: Can Gender-informed Variables Improve Prediction of Institutional Outcomes?* Masters Dissertation. Carleton University.
“The Custody Rating Scale (CRS) is utilized by Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) in classification of women offenders; it is gender-neutral.” “For Indigenous offenders, however, formal ROC comparisons indicated the difference in AUC values between the gender-informed scales and CRS were not statistically significant.”



CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

Custody Rating Scale (CRS) Validation and Revalidations: 1987-2019**What it means**

To date, empirical studies on the CRS show its predictive validity across time and diverse subpopulations. The CRS continues to serve as an effective element in the offender intake assessment process that determines an offender's initial security level placement. It is important to continually scientifically evaluate assessment instruments and decision-making processes as correctional populations and institutional environments change. Thus, the work must not end with these 20 published studies and it will be essential to continue to assess the validity of the CRS on a regular basis and across various offender groups. As well, consideration should be given to perhaps shifting the research focus on the reliability, validity and practical utility of assessment tools to the evaluation of the effectiveness of correctional interventions and the provision of community supports to diverse populations.

For more information

Please email the [Research Branch](#).

You can also visit the [Research Publications](#) section for a full list of reports and one-page summaries.

Prepared by: Larry Motiuk and Leslie-Anne Keown

