

Being Gender Responsive

Why Profile Women Offenders?

- Women's pathways to crime & women's needs are different from men's
- Women offenders represent different challenges to supervision compared to men
- Good systems planning acknowledges that difference
- The two big stories:
 - **Growth in numbers and drugs**

Over 1 million women are now under some form of correctional supervision in this country ... about 1 of every 109 adult women in the United States.

Women Offender Characteristics Related to the Crime Itself

Women are:

- Far less apt to be convicted of a violent crime
- Not likely to be the “kingpin” of drug enterprise
- Less likely to use weapons during the commission of the offense
- Far less apt to have played a major planning role in any enterprise
- Less likely to present the same degree of danger to the community
- Less likely to recidivate for a violent crime

Women Offenders in the Community

- Most female offenders are on probation or parole--85% of all women under correctional supervision
 - Only 15% in prisons or jails
- Community supervision offers best opportunities for interventions and changing the pathways to offending

Women Offenders: Typical Life History

- Nearly 6 in 10 women grew up in a household with at least one parent absent.
- About half report that an immediate family member had also served time.
- More than 40% reported prior physical or sexual abuse.
- Of those, 69% said it happened before age 18.

Women Offender Characteristics: Violence Against Women and Children

- About 52% of child abuse and neglect victims are girls, 48% boys National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect
- From 22-35% of emergency room visits by women are the result of partner violence. S.V. McLeer in American Journal of Public Health

Women Offender Characteristics: Families and Children

- 7 in 10 women in state and federal prisons are mothers:
 - 72% of the women on probation;
 - 70% of the women in jails;
 - 65% of the women in state prisons.
- More than 2 million children have a parent incarcerated—58% are younger than 10.

Women Offender Characteristics: Abuse Histories

- By some estimates, women offenders have abuse rates 6-10 times that of women in the general population. Pollock, 2002
- Owen and Bloom found that physical, sexual and emotional abuse has been a defining experience of the majority of women in one state's prison system.
- Only 6% of 150 respondents in clinical interviews at a state prison reported no history of severe physical or sexual abuse. Angela Browne 1999
 - Ana's story

Women Offender Characteristics: Substance Abuse

- Female substance abusers have a greater number of life problems than do most male substance abusers- employment, family issues, child care, mental health Straussner
- Women who abuse substances also have higher rates of childhood physical and sexual abuse than men or non substance abusing women Covington
- Candy's story

Women Offender Characteristics: Mental Health

- Depression is diagnosed twice as often in women as men
- Women are 2-3 times more likely to be diagnosed with anxiety disorders
 - Phobias, panic, eating disorders and PTSD
- Men - 2x more likely to experience a substance abuse disorder and 5x as likely to experience an antisocial personality disorder

Women Offender Characteristics: Trauma

- Histories of serious traumatic experiences play a vital, and often unrecognized, role in the evolution of an individual's physical and mental health problems.
- The connection between addiction and trauma is intricate and complicated
- In one study of substance abusing women
 - 74% reported sexual abuse (50% non addicted)
 - 52% physical abuse (34% non addicted)
 - 72% emotional abuse (44%)

Women Offender Characteristics: Employment and Education

- In a national jail survey, 60% of the women in jail were unemployed prior to arrest vs. 33% of the men.
- Survey of women's prisons in CA
 - 40% less than high school education
 - 15% has a high school education
 - 25% had some additional training
 - 1/2 of the women had never worked a legitimate job

Defining Gender Responsiveness

What is gender responsiveness?

Gender responsiveness means creating an environment through site selection, staff selection, program development, content, and material that reflects an understanding of the realities of women's lives and addresses the issues of the participants.

Gender-responsiveness approaches are multidimensional and are based on theoretical perspectives that acknowledge women's pathways into the criminal justice system. These approaches address social (e.g., poverty, race, class, and gender inequality) and cultural factors, as well as therapeutic interventions.



Why is Gender Important?

Policy Implications

- Gender consciousness in development and review of all policies and practices
 - i.e., explicit incorporation of knowledge about male/female differences in pathways to offending, offenses and offense patterns, life circumstances, responses to supervision and treatment and programming needs and priorities
- Emphasis on safe, supportive environment
- Exploration of opportunities afforded by low level of public safety risk
- Quest for theoretically-informed and empirically-tested methodologies and curricula

When we ignore gender...

Examples of system disconnects

- Gender consciousness
- Omitted in policy
- Classification & assessment
- Staff training
- Staff sexual misconduct
- Inadequate service delivery

Pathways to Criminality

- Women's past abuse and trauma often dictate their pathway to crime - (destructive) relationships are often involved.
- Women commit different crimes than men and for different reasons.
- Influenced by survival of either poverty, abuse or substance abuse.
- Life events that exacerbate their economic stability.

Implications of gender differences:

Two important issues

- Women's response to community & institutional supervision is different than men's.
- Women's offense patterns & pathways to (and from) crime is different than men's.

Is Gender-Responsiveness Consistent with Equality?

- Equality of treatment does not mean identical treatment.
- Privacy, safety and security demand different treatment of men and women in correctional settings.
- Effective correctional intervention requires responsiveness:
 - the nature and priority of needs are different
 - the types of risk are different

*Implications for Supervision and
Case Management of Women
Offenders in the Criminal Justice
System*

Six Principles of Gender Responsiveness: Implications for Supervision and Case Management of Women Offenders

- Gender matters!
- Create environment based on safety, respect, & dignity
- Programs are relational
- Treatment focused on past trauma and abuse
- Improve economic and social conditions
- Comprehensive, integrated transition and reentry

Typical Community Corrections Interventions

- Reporting schedules
- Mandated employment
- Urinalysis
- Electronic monitoring
- Community service
- Referrals to community resources
- Fees, fines and program costs...

Unanticipated Consequences for Women

Principle 1

Acknowledge that gender makes a
difference

Implementation

- **Make women's issues a priority**
- **Allocate both human & financial resources to create women-centered services**
- **Designate a high-level administrative position for oversight of management, supervision, & services**
- **Recruit & train personnel & volunteers both interested in & qualified to work with women under CJ supervision**

Principle 2

Create an environment based on safety,
respect, & dignity

Implementation

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the institutional or community environment in which the women are supervised to provide an ongoing assessment
- Develop policy that reflects an understanding of the importance of emotional & physical safety
- Understand the effects of childhood trauma in order to avoid further traumatization
- Establish protocols for reporting & investigating claims of misconduct
- Develop classification & assessment systems that are validated on samples of women

Principle 3

Develop policies, practices & programs that are relational & promote healthy connections to children, family, significant others, & the community

Implementation

- **Develop training for staff & administrators in which relationship issues are a core theme**
- **Examine mother & child programming through the eyes of the child & enhance the mother-child connection**
- **Promote supportive relationships among women offenders**
- **Develop community & peer-support networks**

Principle 4

Address the issues of substance abuse, trauma, & mental health through comprehensive, integrated, culturally-relevant services & appropriate supervision

Implementation

- Service providers need to be cross-trained in substance abuse, trauma, & mental health
- Resources, including skilled personnel, must be allocated
- The environment in which services are provided must be closely monitored to ensure emotional & physical safety of the women being served
- Service providers/criminal justice personnel must receive training in cultural sensitivity

Principle 5

Improve women's economic/social conditions by developing their capacity to be self-sufficient

Implementation

- **Allocate resources within both community & institutional correctional programs for services that focus on economic, social, & treatment needs of women**
- **Provide traditional & nontraditional training, education, & skill-enhancing opportunities**
- **Provide sober living space in institutions & in the community**

Principle 6

Establish a system of community supervision & reentry with comprehensive, collaborative services

Implementation

- Create individualized support plans & wrap the necessary resources around the woman & her children
- Develop a “one-stop shopping” approach to community services
- Use a coordinated case management model for community supervision

Some points to remember...

The Three R's of Case Planning

As case plans are developed by officers for individual cases, they should test each plan against the three R's:

- *Relevancy*

Is the case plan for supervision pertinent to this woman?
Does it take into account the circumstances and issues that affect women's criminal behavior and potential for successful outcomes under supervision?

- *Research-based*

Have the goals, objectives, and activities of the supervision plan been developed using current research and literature on best practices for implementing gender responsive strategies?

- *Realistic*

Can the woman offender reasonably be expected to achieve the goals and objectives outlined in the case plan within the time allotted? Has appropriate information been included about the woman's involvement in other systems and those systems' requirements for her? Has a plan for collaboration and coordination with the other systems been developed?