

Gender-Responsive Case Management

While men still account for the majority of people in the criminal justice system, the proportion of women has been growing steadily over the past several decades. More than a million women are now either in prison or jail or on community supervision.¹ Despite this, criminal justice policies, practices, and programs have historically been designed for men and applied to women without consideration of women's distinct needs. While gender-neutral approaches—if evidence-based—can be effective in reducing recidivism for both men and women, research has shown that gender-responsive approaches result in far better outcomes for women.²

Gender-responsive and trauma-informed policies, practices, and programs recognize that women have distinct histories, pathways to offending, and experiences in the criminal justice system.³ These approaches address issues that may contribute to women's involvement in the justice system, such as domestic violence, abuse, and victimization; family and relationships; trauma; and poverty, mental illnesses, and substance use disorders.

The Problem

Risk assessment, classification, and programming processes in the criminal justice system were developed with the needs of men in mind. Similarly, case management approaches—which seek to connect people to needed social, medical, behavioral health, housing, and other services—have not fully taken into account the distinct needs of women.⁴ As a result, gender-responsive case management models have been created to better respond to women's complex risks and needs and to connect them with resources and treatment to support successful reentry and recovery in the community.

Applying a Gender-Responsive Approach

The Women Offender Case Management Model (WOCMM), now known as Collaborative Case Work with Women (CCW-W),⁵ is a case management model designed specifically for use with women in the criminal justice system. CCW-W uses gender-informed, evidence-based practices to support women's recovery and success in the community while minimizing risk of further involvement in the criminal justice system. It was developed by the National Institute of Corrections and Orbis Partners to provide uninterrupted, coordinated services that can begin at sentencing and continue through community reentry and supervision. It is facilitated by a case manager who meets with a multidisciplinary team that can include medical personnel, treatment specialists, institutional staff, parole/probation officers, community providers, family members, mentors, and the woman herself.

1. The Sentencing Project, *Incarcerated Women and Girls* (Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project, 2020), <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/incarcerated-women-and-girls/#:~:text=Though%20many%20more%20women%20are,of%20the%20criminal%20justice%20system.>

2. Kelley Blanchette, Renee Gobeil, and Lynn Stewart, "A Meta-Analytic Review of Correctional Interventions for Women Offenders: Gender-Neutral Versus Gender-Informed Approaches," *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 43, no. 3 (2016): 301–322.

3. Barbara Bloom, Barbara Owen, and Stephanie Covington, *Gender-Responsive Strategies: Research, Practice, and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections, 2003), <https://info.nicic.gov/nicrp/system/files/018017.pdf>.

4. "Case Management," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), accessed March 8, 2021, <https://www.samhsa.gov/homelessness-programs-resources/hpr-resources/case-management>.

5. For a description of the CCW-W model see Orbis Partners, Inc., *Women Offender Case Management Model* (Ottawa, Ontario: Orbis Partners, Inc., 2006), <https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/021814.pdf>.

The model is based on nine core principles:

1. Provide comprehensive case management that addresses the complex and multiple needs of women in the criminal justice system.
2. Recognize that all women have strengths that can be mobilized.
3. Ensure that women are collaboratively involved to establish desired outcomes.
4. Promote services that are unlimited in duration.
5. Match services in accordance with risk level and need.
6. Build links with the community.
7. Establish a multidisciplinary “case management team.”
8. Monitor progress and evaluate outcomes.
9. Implement procedures to ensure program integrity.

Collaborative comprehensive case plans (CC case plans)⁶

can also be used to assist case planners and others with better integrating behavioral health and criminogenic risk and needs information into case plans that actively engage women in the criminal justice system. Like the CCW-W model, CC case plans involve collaboration between criminal justice, behavioral health, and social service systems to achieve more successful outcomes with women. They also specifically include gender considerations as one of the 10 priority areas of focus, because women often have different behavioral health needs and responsivity factors than men.

In Practice: Connecticut implemented the CCW-W with women in the Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, and New Haven probation sites and is seeing promising results. In one outcome evaluation of 174 women being supervised by the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch/Court Support Services Division, one-year follow-up data revealed that CCW-W participants had a significantly lower rate of new arrests in comparison to members of the matched control group (31.6 percent vs. 42.5 percent). The rate of any new arrests for high-risk CCW-W participants was also 36.1 percent compared to 49.5 percent for high-risk matched control group members.*

*Orbis Partners, Inc., Women Offender Case Management Model: Outcome Evaluation (Ottawa, Ontario: Orbis, Partners, Inc., 2010), <https://cjininvolvedwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Women-Offender-Case-Management-Model.pdf>.

6. For further information, see “Collaborative Comprehensive Case Plans,” National Reentry Resource Center, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/collaborative-comprehensive-case-plans/>.

For more information on adopting a gender-responsive approach for women in the justice system, see the full Resource Guide.



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