

Gender-Responsive Criminogenic Risk and Needs Assessment

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

Criminogenic risk and needs assessments help guide decision-making at various points across the criminal justice continuum by estimating a person's likelihood of recidivism. Some of these assessment instruments also identify individualized risk/need profiles, which assist in determining appropriate programs, interventions, and supervision levels to mitigate that risk. Most of these tools are designed to be gender neutral and do not provide as much additional information about women's criminogenic risks and needs as gender-specific instruments do. Some risk factors critical to women (e.g., relationship conflict, housing safety, and mental health) are often absent in gender-neutral tools altogether.⁴ And despite the fact that strengths and protective factors, such as self-efficacy, family support, and education, have been shown to significantly impact women's recidivism outcomes, gender-neutral tools do not examine or weigh these items differently for men and women.⁵ As a result, research suggests that gender-neutral tools are less valid for women than for men and may overclassify women into higher risk categories than their behaviors warrant.⁶

Applying a Gender-Responsive Approach

Gender-responsive criminogenic risk and needs assessment instruments incorporate the same principles as traditional gender-neutral assessments but also examine gender-responsive factors for women. These assessments weigh risk factors differently and include risk factors that are predictive for women only, such as depression, anxiety, and unhealthy relationships.⁷

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%20men%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. Emily M. Wright et al., "Gender-Responsive Lessons Learned and Policy Implications for Women in Prison: A Review," *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 39, no. 12 (2012): 1612–1632, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0093854812451088>.

5. Ibid.

6. Patricia L. Hardyman and Patricia Van Voorhis, *Developing Gender-Specific Classification Systems for Women Offenders* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections, 2004).

7. Emily Salisbury, "When Gender Neutral is Not Good Enough in Working with Justice Involved Women" (transcript of a session at the National Institute of Corrections Virtual Conference, November 9, 2016).

The table below provides information about gender-responsive risk and needs assessment tools and additional tools that are useful when working with women in the criminal justice system. The results of these assessments will be critical to tailor programming to meet the distinct needs of women, make pretrial risk decisions, and determine the intensity level of community-based supervision.

Gender-Responsive Tools	
TOOL NAME	DESCRIPTION
Criminogenic Risk and Needs Assessment—Pretrial	
Gender Informed Needs Assessment (GINA)⁸	The GINA is an assessment designed to be used with women in the pretrial stage. ⁹
Criminogenic Risk and Needs Assessments—Pre- or Post-Sentencing	
Northpointe Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS) for Women	The COMPAS assessment includes a gender-responsive scale that can be used when assessing women. ¹⁰
Service Planning Instrument for Women (SPIn-W)	The SPIn-W contains about 100 items that assess risk, needs, and protective factors that are relevant for increasing responsiveness in case work with women in the criminal justice system. The full assessment includes 11 domains. ¹¹
Women’s Risk and Needs Assessments (WRNA), both the stand-alone and trailer instruments¹²	The National Institute of Corrections, in cooperation with the University of Cincinnati, developed the WRNA. The assessment includes both a full instrument of about 80 items that assesses both gender-neutral and gender-responsive factors and provides separate forms for probation, prison, and pre-release. The WRNA-Trailer is designed to supplement existing risk and needs assessments (e.g., LSI-R, COMPAS). New versions of the WRNA and WRNA-T were released in 2014. ¹³

8. For more information about the GINA, see Krista S. Gehring and Patricia Van Voorhis, “Needs and Pretrial Failure,” *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 41, no. 8 (2014): 943–970.

9. Inquiries about the GINA should be made to Bauman Consulting Group, info@baumanconsultinggroup.com.

10. For further information see “Northpointe Suite Case Manager,” Equivant, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.equivant.com/northpointe-suite/>.

11. For further information see “SPIn-W Assessment,” Orbis Partners, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://orbispartners.com/assessment/gender-responsive-spin-w/>.

12. Inquiries about the WRNA should be made to Dr. Emily J. Salisbury, Director, Utah Criminal Justice Center, Associate Professor, College of Social Work, emily.salisbury@utah.edu or (801) 581-4379.

13. Patricia Van Voorhis et al., “Women’s Risk Factors and Their Contributions to Existing Risk/Needs Assessment: The Current Status of a Gender-Responsive Supplement,” *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 37, no. 3 (2010): 261–288.

Trauma-Focused Screening Instruments

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)	The ACEs questionnaire is a 10-item self-administered questionnaire that measures the impact of childhood experiences on adult health and negative consequences. The higher the ACE score the more likely negative impacts are in adulthood. ¹⁴
Life Events Checklist for DSM-5 (LEC-5)¹⁵	“LEC-5 is a self-report measure designed to screen for potentially traumatic events in a respondent’s lifetime. The LEC-5 assesses exposure to 16 events known to potentially result in PTSD or distress and includes one additional item assessing any other extraordinarily stressful event not captured in the first 16 items.” ¹⁶
Life Stressor Checklist-Revised (LSC-R)¹⁷	The LSC-R is a self-report measure that assesses stressful life events. The LSC-R contains 30 items that ask about exposure to traumatic events, including natural disasters; accidents; physical/sexual abuse; and other stressful life events, such as divorce, foster care, and financial difficulties. Some events, like sexual abuse, are queried for occurrence in both childhood and adulthood. The instrument also includes an item specific to women (occurrence of abortion). ¹⁸
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5)¹⁹	“The PCL-5 is a 20-item self-report assessment that assesses the 20 DSM-5 symptoms of PTSD. The PCL-5 is a screening tool for PTSD, helps professionals make a PTSD diagnosis and helps to monitor symptom change during and after treatment.” ²⁰
Stressful Life Events Screening Questionnaire (SLESQ)	The SLESQ is a 13-item self-report measure that assesses lifetime exposure to traumatic events. ²¹

14. “Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs),” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/index.html>.

15. The LEC-5 is a public domain instrument available for download on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs website at https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/te-measures/life_events_checklist.asp.

16. “Life Events Checklist for DSM-5 (LEC-5),” U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD, accessed April 20, 2020, https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/te-measures/life_events_checklist.asp.

17. The LSC-R is a public domain instrument available for download on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs website at <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/te-measures/lsc-r.asp>.

18. “Life Stressor Checklist - Revised (LSC-R),” U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/te-measures/lsc-r.asp>.

19. The PCL-5 is a public domain instrument available for download on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs website at <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/adult-sr/ptsd-checklist.asp>.

20. “PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5),” National Center for PTSD, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/adult-sr/ptsd-checklist.asp>.

21. “Stressful Life Events Screening Questionnaire - Revised,” Georgetown University, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://georgetown.app.box.com/s/nzprmm2bn5pwzdw1l62w>.

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



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