Gender-Responsive Strategies: Research, Practice, and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders

Barbara E. Bloom, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Dept. of Criminology and Criminal Justice
Sonoma State University

Ohio State University
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Overview

- Characteristics of women offenders
- Review of research and theory
- Effects of gender on criminal justice practice
- Guiding principles
- Gender-responsive approaches and curricula
The NIC Project: Gender-Responsive Strategies: Research, Practice, and Guiding Principles

- National focus groups
- Literature, research & policy review
- Practitioner advisory board
- Multiple reviewers across the CJ spectrum
Gender-Responsive Definition

Creating an environment through site selection, staff selection, program development, content, and material that reflects an understanding of the realities of the lives of women and girls and that addresses and responds to their strengths and challenges.

(Covington & Bloom)
More than one million women are currently under criminal justice supervision in the U.S. The majority are on probation.

As of June 30, 2005, there were over 106,000 women incarcerated in state and federal prisons (7% of all inmates).

As of June 30, 2005, there were over 94,000 women in local jails (12.7% of jail population).
Offense Profiles

• The number of women under CJ supervision has risen disproportionately to arrest rates.

• Arrests of women accounted for less than one-fourth of all arrests in 2002.

• Most women were arrested for property offenses (nearly 31%), followed by drug offenses (18%) and DUI (17%).

• Women accounted for 17% of arrests for violent offenses.
The Context of Women’s Lives:
A Multidisciplinary Review of Research & Theory
Theoretical Perspective

- Pathways Perspective
- Relational Theory & Female Development
- Trauma Theory
- Addiction Theory
Pathways Perspective

- Women’s crimes embedded in the conditions of their lives
- Examines the specific life course events that place women at risk for offending
- Triple jeopardy: The impact of race, class & gender (Bloom)
- Multiple marginality: From families, school, work (Owen)
- Trauma & addiction (Covington)
Violence Against Women and Children

- Witnessing domestic violence as a child may cause increased vulnerability to victimization in adulthood

- Women in the CJ system have extensive histories of physical & sexual abuse and are 3 times more likely than men to have a history of abuse

- One-third of women in state prison & one-quarter of those in jails report being raped at some time in their lives

- Women’s substance abuse is highly correlated with physical & sexual abuse
• African American women comprise only 13% of all women in the U.S., yet they make-up nearly half of the women in State and Federal prisons.

• Similarly, in Hawaii, Hawaiian/Part-Hawaiian women are over-represented in correctional settings.
Education & Employment

• An estimated 55% of women in jail, 56% in state prisons & 73% in federal prisons have a high school degree

• Approximately 40% of women in state prisons were employed at the time of arrest compared to 60% of males

• 37% of women compared to 28% of men had incomes of less than $600 per month prior to arrest
The Drug-Crime Connection for Women

- Introduced to both by males typically
- Onset in women faster & deeper
- Onset of drugs first, crime usually follows closely
- Dual diagnosis relationship
- Role of self-medication & trauma
The interrelationship of substance abuse, mental health & trauma is different in the lives of women.

The pathway to drug use & abuse is more complex for women.

Women who abuse drugs have higher rates of childhood physical & sexual abuse than men.

About 22% of women in jail are diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
Health Issues

- Males & females experience disease differently (cardiovascular disease, cancer, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS)
- Women offenders have backgrounds of inadequate health care & risky behaviors
- Women prisoners are more likely than men to test positive for HIV
- Pregnancy & reproductive needs
• Approximately 70% of women under correctional supervision have at least 1 child under 18

• Two-thirds of incarcerated women have children under 18

• An estimated 1.3 million minor children have a mother under correctional supervision

• More than a quarter of a million children have mothers in jail or prison
Relational Theory and Female Development

- Stone Center Relational Model: Connection with others guides growth for females
- Gilligan’s theory of female “moral” development
- Communication
The Relational Context is Critical in Understanding:

- Reasons why females commit crimes
- Behavior under supervision
- Motivation for change
- Reintegration into the community
- Relationships with children & significant others
Trauma Theory

- Trauma is the injury done by violence & abuse
- Trauma occurs on multiple levels
- Trauma recovery (Herman)
- Trauma-informed services
Trauma-Informed Services

- Take the trauma into account
- Avoid triggering trauma reactions
- Adjust the behavior of counselors, staff and the organization to support the individual
- Allow survivors to manage their trauma symptoms
Trauma-Specific Services

- Increase skills and strategies to allow survivors to manage their symptoms and reactions
- Minimal disruption to daily obligations and quality of life
- Reduction or elimination of debilitating symptoms
- Prevention of further traumatization and violence
Theory of Addiction

- Holistic health model
- Relational aspects of addiction
- Incorporation of trauma & relational theories
Differences with a Distinction: Gender and Criminal Justice Practice

- Criminal justice facilities are managed based on policies and procedures developed for the management of male offenders.

- Gendered differences in women’s pathways to imprisonment, offense patterns, behavior while incarcerated, and their needs before, during and after incarceration must be considered in planning appropriate correctional policy and intervention.
Important Considerations of Gender on Current Criminal Justice Practice

- Assessment procedures
- Services and programs
- Staffing and training
Services and Programs for Women Must Acknowledge Gender

- Substance abuse services
- Interventions for physical, sexual, and psychological abuse
- Health and mental health services
- Education and vocational training
- Life skills development
Staffing and Training

- There is a need for gender-specific training for all practitioners.
- Staff often lack information or training about dealing with female caseloads.
- Perceptions that female offenders are more difficult to work with than male offenders must be remedied.
Guiding Principles for a Gender-Responsive Criminal Justice System

- Gender
- Environment
- Relationships
- Services & Supervision
- Economic & Social Status
- Community
Principle 1

Gender

Acknowledge that gender makes a difference
Create an environment based on safety, respect, & dignity
Principle 3

Develop policies, practices & programs that are relational & promote healthy connections to children, family, significant others, & the community.
Principle 4

Address substance abuse, trauma, & mental health issues through comprehensive, integrated, culturally relevant services & appropriate supervision.
Principle 5

Economic & Social Status

Provide women with opportunities to improve their socioeconomic conditions
Principle 6

Establish a system of community supervision & reentry with comprehensive, collaborative services
Legal Barriers Facing Women Returning to Their Communities

- Personal Responsibility & Work Opportunity Act of 1996
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Higher Education Act of 1998
- Public Housing - Section 8
- Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997
Why Develop Gender-Responsive Programs?

- Women and girls travel a different path to crime and delinquency than most of their male counterparts.

- After years of struggling to squeeze women and girls into programs designed for men and boys, some agencies that work with females are seeking approaches that are gender-specific.
Approaches for Developing Gender-Responsive Programs and Services

Structure

- Contemporary theoretical perspectives on women’s (and girls) particular pathways into the criminal justice system (e.g., relational theory, trauma theory) fit the psychological and social needs of women and reflect the realities of their lives.

- Treatment and services are based on women’s (and girls) competencies and strengths and promote self-reliance.
Structure (cont.)

- Women-only groups are used, especially for primary treatment (e.g., trauma, substance abuse)
- Staff members reflect the client population in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, language (bilingual), and ex-offender and recovery status.
- Female role models and mentors are provided who reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of the clients.
Approaches for Developing Gender-Responsive Programs and Services

Content and Context/Environment

- To fully address the needs of women, programs use a variety of interventions with behavioral, cognitive, affective/dynamic, and systems perspectives.
- Services/treatment address women’s practical needs, such as housing, transportation, childcare, and vocational training and job placement.
Content/Context/Environment

- Participants receive opportunities to develop skills in a range of educational and vocational (including nontraditional) areas.
- Emphasis is placed on parenting education, child development, and relationship/reunification with children.
- The environment is child friendly, with age-appropriate activities designed for children.
Theoretical Foundation

The theories related to gender and substance abuse (and any other relevant treatment services) that create the framework of thought for program development. This is the knowledge base that creates the foundation upon which the program is developed.
Treatment Strategies

The approaches used in the program that create the therapeutic process. These are the ways in which theory is operationalized (how theory is applied).
Gender-Responsive Program Materials

- **Helping Women Recover: A Program for Treating Substance Abuse**

- **Voices: A Program of Self-Exploration and Empowerment**

- **Beyond Trauma: A Healing Journey for Women**