

Complex Trauma and Criminogenic Needs in a Youth Justice Sample: A Gender-Informed Latent Profile Analysis

Shelley L. Brown, Kayla A. Wanamaker, Leigh Greiner, Terri Scott, Tracey A. Skilling
in CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND BEHAVIOUR - 2020

BACKGROUND

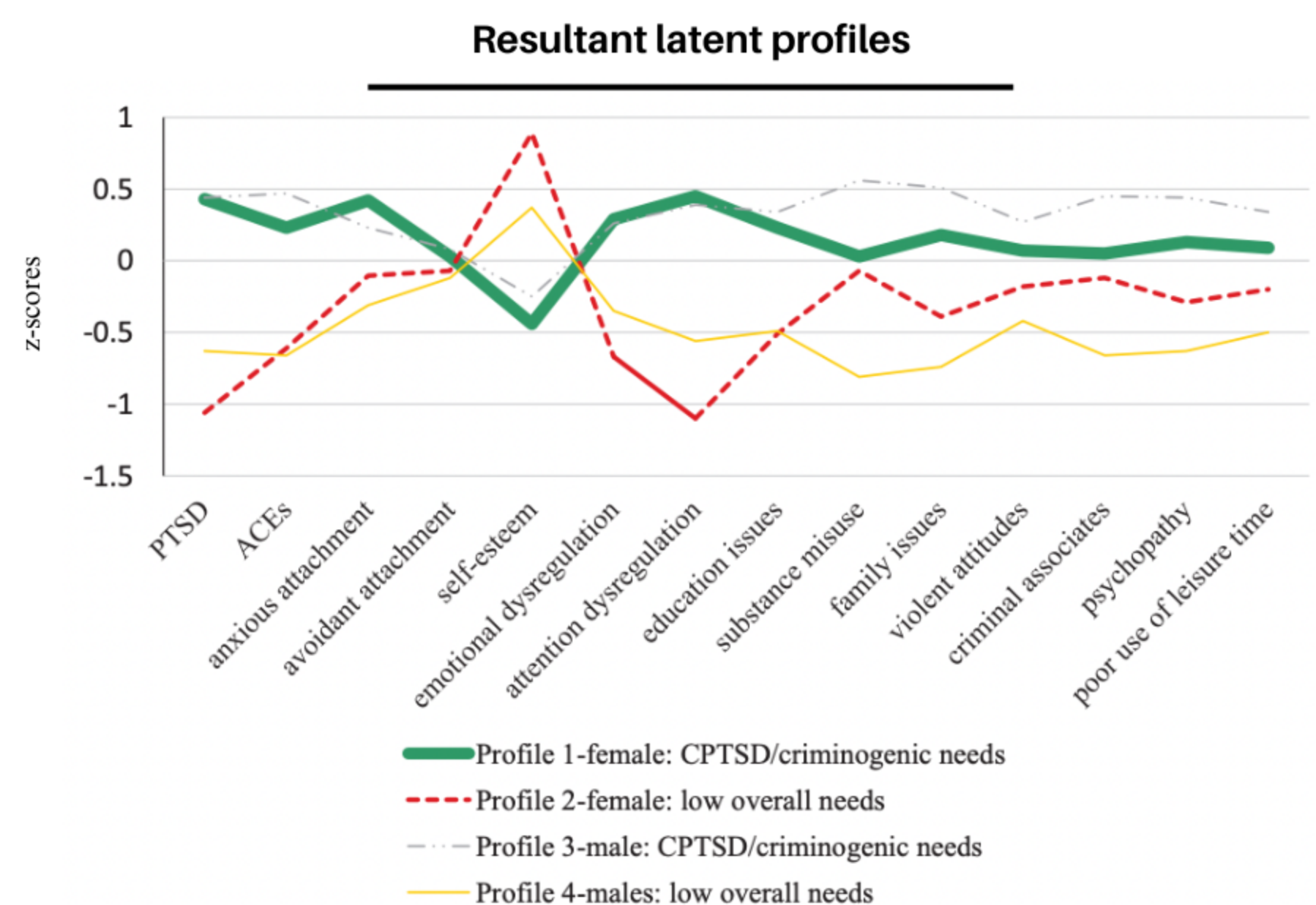
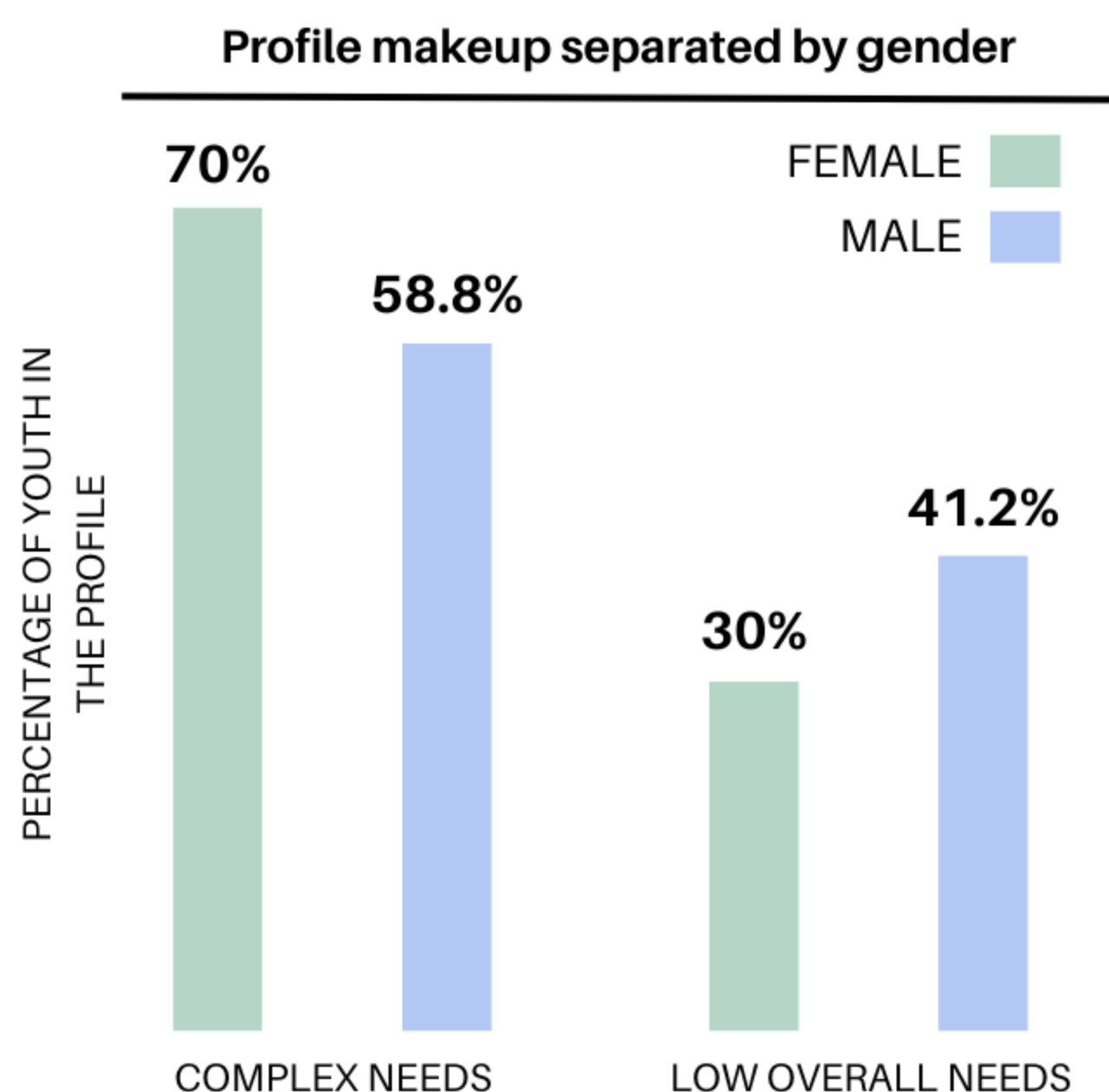
Historically, the study of criminal conduct and its assessment have been grounded in gender-neutral (male centric) paradigms. Scholars who follow gender-neutral approaches typically adhere to the gender-neutral personality/social learning model (GPCSL). This model emphasizes procriminal attitudes, criminal associates, and antisocial personality as the primary risk factors for involvement in criminal activity. However, a new generation of scholars, known as gender-responsive scholars, has emerged. These researchers predominantly study girls and women involved in the justice system and utilize theories such as relational cultural theory and trauma-informed approaches. Unlike gender-neutral perspectives, gender-responsive theories prioritize the impact of interpersonal trauma, addictions, maladaptive relationships, and limited social support networks on justice involvement. By adopting person-centered approaches, gender-responsive scholars have begun exploring the diverse experiences and characteristics within justice-involved populations. In previous scholarship, complex trauma (CT; gender-responsive) and social learning and personality traits (GPCSL; gender-neutral) have been presented as distinct models, but preliminary work has shown that many of the above risk factors exist simultaneously in samples of girls and women, and in some studies of boys and men. Further research is needed to understand if and how these variables co-vary across all genders.

WHAT WE DID

To examine how complex trauma features and criminogenic needs co-vary within a youth justice sample, latent profile analysis (LPA) was applied to a sample of Canadian youth who were remanded to custody or convicted of a criminal offence (211 male, 100 female). We wanted to identify the emergence of any unique profiles characterized by different combinations of comorbid needs (pulled from CT and GPCSL models). Youth were measured on seven constructs that captured complex PTSD (CT pathway) and seven central needs as identified within the GPCSL model.

WHAT WE FOUND

The application of LPA to the sample yielded two similar profiles for males and females alike, including a cohort of youth who experienced complex needs: complex trauma and high criminogenic needs (profiles 1 & 3); and a cohort of youth who evidenced low overall needs (profiles 2 & 4). Relative to their female counterparts, males with complex needs scored higher in all criminogenic need areas: education, substance misuse, violent attitudes, criminal associates, psychopathy and poor use of leisure time. In contrast to youth in the complex needs profile, youth in the low overall needs profile evidenced comparably lower levels on all complex PTSD and criminogenic indicators.



WHY IT MATTERS

The findings clearly display the need for trauma-informed services that target criminogenic needs in both genders. Like trauma-informed approaches that have been developed specifically for girls and women, trauma-informed approaches that have been developed specifically for boys and men require serious consideration and evaluation.