Gender differences in strengths and predicting success: Evidence from Alberta, Canada

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, correctional research and practice has emphasized personal deficits (i.e., risks/needs) to examine the onset and continuation of criminal behavior. However, with the development of positive psychology and the concept of resilience, correctional researchers have recently begun to shift their focus to offenders’ strengths. Drawing from a large sample of over 30,000 offenders on community supervision from Alberta, Canada, assessment data from the Service Planning Instrument (SPIn; Orbis Partners) and corresponding recidivism data was examined to help explain how strengths can be incorporated into risk management practices among both male and female offenders. Because the SPIn incorporates a variety of gender-neutral and gender-responsive items, it provides an optimal basis for examining gender differences in strengths.

Partially, few studies have examined gender differences in strengths especially using multi-wave longitudinal data with large sample sizes. As such, the current research focuses on three main learning objectives: 1) define and differentiate strengths from risk factors, 2) examine how SPIn-assessed strengths predict success (i.e., refraining from crime), and 3) identify whether there are gender differences in the predictive ability of SPIn-assessed strengths. Overall, this research will help determine which strengths or combinations of strengths are most predictive of success for male versus female offenders.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

6465 females; random sample of 6465 males on probation from Alberta, Canada

Female mean age: 32.64 (mode = 20, range 16–80)

Male mean age: 33.45 (mode = 21, range 17–87)

Females: 4498 (69.6%) non-Indigenous

Indigenous: 1967 (30.4%) Indigenous

Males: 5313 (82.2%) non-Indigenous

1152 (17.8%) Indigenous

DATA ANALYSIS

RESULTS

Females scored higher on the attitudes and skills strengths domains

Not surprising—male offenders typically exhibit antisocial criminal attitudes (Bonta & Andrews, 2017)

No gender differences on scores on family strength

Unexpected finding—females are typically lower risk and family is an important factor (Bonta, 2015)

Static strength not found to predict admissions to custody for either gender; similar trend for Family and Attitudes strength domain (in contrast, static risk IS predictive)

Most individual strength scores had small predictive effects with the exception of the SPIn pre-screen, yielding moderate effects for both genders (although statistically stronger for females)

Quantitative inclusion of SPIn-assessed strengths may allow for a more precise estimation of risk classification levels and level of contact/programming for offenders—especially female offenders

REFERENCES


