

Perceptions of Risk, Need, and Supervision Difficulty in the Community Corrections Setting

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Abstract

In the past few decades, shifts in client population and criticisms of ineffectiveness have prompted probation agencies to increase their use of objective case classification systems. Most correctional agencies utilize the same risk assessment instrument for both male and female offenders, and the assumption is that these tools perform an adequate job of assessing risks for both populations. However, research indicates that female offenders pose a much lower risk and have different need factors compared to their male counterparts. Despite the prevalence of risk assessment instruments in the community corrections setting, it is still unknown how gender influences risk and need. As such, the goal of the present study is to examine issues of risk and need in the classification and supervision of women in the community corrections setting. Furthermore, this study seeks to explore the difficulties that officers may encounter when supervising both male and female offenders in the community.

Key Words: risk assessment, gender, probation, supervision difficulty

INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, shifts in client population and criticisms of ineffectiveness have prompted probation agencies to increase their use of objective case classification systems (also referred to as actuarial risk assessment tools, instruments, or techniques) (Jones, Johnson, Latessa, & Travis, 1999). Underlying much of the objective classification are actuarial statistics. Actuarial tools aggregate offenders with similar characteristics to better predict and plan risks (Simon, 1987, p. 62). The driving force behind current actuarial risk assessment tools is the idea that scientific research-generated guidelines are superior to professional opinion. The most popular version of these assessments includes both measures of risk (to determine security level) and need (to determine treatment program referrals).

The body of literature that is primarily responsible for documenting and interpreting the role of risk and the criminal justice system comes under the heading of the “new penology,” risk

penology, or postmodern penology.¹ This literature highlights the purported shift away from the reliance on rehabilitative techniques and a move toward the management, custody, and control of dangerous offenders, often through actuarial techniques (Feeley & Simon, 1992; 1995). The general question of risk is discussed primarily in terms of specifying markers that demonstrate the shift to increasing reliance on actuarial risk assessment tools (Feeley & Simon, 1992) and increasing the severity of punishments. While the terminology employed to characterize this presumed shift is varied, as evidenced in postmodern penalty (Feeley & Simon, 1992) or late modernity (Garland, 1995; Lucken, 1998), the debate is one of interpreting current penal trends in the context of their departure from conventional practice.

Much of the punishment literature on risk has tended to focus on identifying and interpreting broad trends in punishment, and most researchers have identified risk as a relevant feature of punishment. While generalized explanations of penal trends are important for clarifying what are often complex and contradictory structures, meaningful variations in penal trends may be lost in the process or unrepresented. For instance, many correctional systems assume that risk is genderless, classless, and raceless (Hannah-Moffat, 1999). This is exemplified in the reliance on the same risk assessment instruments to determine institutional risk for all types of inmates and risk to the community for all types of offenders supervised in the community. However, Beck (1992) does concede that the growth of risk will likely affect some people more than others, thereby creating social risk positions. Similarly, research on crime has established that crime and victimization are not evenly distributed across all groups (Farrell, 1992; Garland, 1996; Polvi, Looman, Humphries, & Pease, 1990). Current Uniform Crime Report (UCR) data indicates that males account for 76.2% of all arrests and 82.1% of arrests for violent crime (FBI, 2007). Given this, it is clear that the likelihood of being victimized by a female offender is much lower than that of a male offender, thereby supporting the idea that risks are not equal and may not operate the same across gender.

Despite the prevalence of risk assessment instruments in the community corrections setting, it is still unknown how gender influences risk and need. As such, the goal of the present study is to examine issues of risk and need in the classification and supervision of women in the community corrections setting. Furthermore, this study seeks to explore the difficulties that officers may encounter when supervising both male and female offenders in the community.

Given the unprecedented increases in the female offender population in recent years (Harrison & Beck, 2003; United States Department of Justice [USDJ], 1998), and the unique needs that female offenders have, with regard to motherhood (Greenfield & Snell, 1999; Kim, 2001; Temin, 2001), substance dependency (Greenfield & Snell, 1999), and physical and sexual abuse (Florida Corrections Commission [FCC], 2000; Greenfield & Snell, 1999), it is important to expand the current level of research to include female offenders in discussions of risk.

LITERATURE REVIEW

With regard to risk, examination of female offenders typically takes the form of analyzing the efficacy of gender-neutral risk assessment tools to adequately predict risk for women (Bonta, Pang, & Wallace-Capretta, 1995; Farr, 2000; Funk, 1999; Harer & Langan 2001; Holsinger,

1. Risk is considered a postmodern issue in criminal justice even though others outside of the discipline may not necessarily characterize it in this way.

Lowenkamp, & Latessa, 2003; McShane, Williams, & Dolny, 2002; Van Voorhis & Presser, 2001). The vast majority of this empirical research has focused on female correctional inmates, thus neglecting how risk operates for women in the community setting. This gap in the empirical research is problematic given that approximately 85% of female offenders are supervised in the community under probation and parole authorities (Greenfield & Snell, 1999).

The unique issues of female offenders

The past few decades have witnessed unparalleled growth of females in the correctional system (Chesney-Lind, 1997; Gilliard & Beck, 1998; Harrison & Beck, 2003; Morash, Bynum, & Koons, 1998; USDJ, 1998). Recent figures indicate that nearly one out of every 109 adult women in the United States is under some form of correctional supervision on any given day (Greenfield & Snell, 1999). While female offenders make up 7% of the state and federal correctional populations, 23% of probationers, 12.7% of the local jail population, and 12% of the parole population (Glaze & Bonczar, 2006; Harrison & Beck, 2006), the rate of increased involvement in the system has prompted concern. Between 1981 and 1991, the number of female inmates increased by 254%, compared to a 147% increase for male inmates during the same period (Blomberg & Lucken, 1998). Between 1990 and 1998, the number of women under some form of correctional supervision increased dramatically. According to Greenfield and Snell (1999), the female prison and jail incarceration rates increased 88% and 40%, respectively. Similarly, community corrections witnessed large per capita increases of females under supervision, with probation supervision increasing by 40% and parole supervision increasing by 80% (Greenfield & Snell, 1999). The rate of growth in incarceration continues, and, since 1995, the annual growth rate of female incarceration has averaged a 4.7% increase, compared to the 3% increase for male prisoners (Harrison & Beck, 2006).

The boom in the female incarceration rate can be attributed to a number of factors, including determinate sentencing and tougher sanctions for drug offenses (Kim, 2001; USDJ, 1998; Young & Smith, 2000). Notably, there is no evidence to suggest that the increase in female incarceration occurred in response to a more dangerous and more disenfranchised violent breed of female offender (Mullings, Pollock, & Crouch, 2002; Snider, 2003), which has been cited as a general cause for the shift to a risk based penology (Feeley & Simon, 1992). The majority of women under correctional supervision have committed offenses such as theft, prostitution, and/or drug offenses (Covington, 2001; Greenfield & Snell, 1999; Young & Smith, 2000), which are not associated with fear of crime and risk. The Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report on Female Offenders indicates that of the 721,400 women under probation supervision in 1999 only 9% were convicted of a violent crime, with the remaining 91% having been convicted for property, drug, or public order offenses (Greenfield & Snell, 1999).

Clearly these figures suggest that “risk” as far as women are concerned rarely indicates violence. The unique needs of women in the system also challenge conventional assumptions about risk and dangerousness. Consider, for example, that most women under correctional supervision are mothers, with approximately 70% having at least one child less than 18 years of age, (Greenfield & Snell, 1999). The vast majority of these women were the primary caretakers of their children and more than two-thirds had lived with their children prior to incarceration (Greenfield & Snell, 1999; Kim, 2001; Temin, 2001). It is estimated that only 44 percent of male offenders in state prison lived with their minor children prior to arrest (Greenfield & Snell, 1999).

Approximately 6% of female inmates will also enter prison/jail pregnant and will give birth behind bars (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993). Children born in prison are typically removed from their mother's care two to three days after birth (Temin, 2001). Once separated from their mother, only 25% of these children will live with their father, 51% will live with their grandparents, 20% will live with other relatives, 4% will live with a family friend, and 11% will be placed in foster care (Dressel, Porterfield, & Barnhill, 1998; USDJ, 1998).

Gender is further relevant to the question of risk considering that many female offenders are victims in their own right. Female offenders suffer physical abuse, sexual abuse, and drug addiction at much higher rates than do male offenders. Nearly 60% of women being held in state prisons reported experiencing some type of severe abuse in the past (Greenfield & Snell, 1999). In a Florida study, 57% of female offenders versus 16% of male offenders, reported physical or sexual abuse prior to their incarceration (FCC, 2000). Drug addiction also poses a significant problem for female offenders. In a study on drug use, female offenders reported using drugs more frequently than male offenders—40% compared to 32% (Greenfield & Snell, 1999).

HIV infection and AIDS present another problem for female offenders. In the prison population, females suffer from the disease at much higher rates than males (Anderson, Rosay, & Saum, 2002). In 1995, the incidence of HIV infection among women inmates was almost double that of male inmates—4% compared to 2.3% (Gowdy, Cain, Corrothers, Katsel, Parmley, & Schmidt, 1998). The high rates of the disease among female offenders are attributed to a number of factors, including drug use, trading sex for drugs and money, sexual abuse, prostitution, and living in impoverished conditions (Anderson et al., 2002; Decker, 1992; Snell & Morton, 1994; DeGroot, Leibel, & Zierler, 1998; Kane & DiBartolo, 2002; Zaitzow, 2001).

A final problem that factors into discussions of risk and women is the prevalence of mental illness among the female offender population. Numerous studies have found high rates of mental health problems among incarcerated women (Kane & DiBartolo, 2002; Scott, Hannum, & Ghris, 1982; Teplin, Abram, & McClelland, 1996). While mental illness also affects the male offender population, research has shown that women suffer at higher rates (Anderson et al., 2002; Ditton, 1999; Harlow, 1999; Harrison & Lawrence, 1998). According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 24% of female prison and jail inmates and 22% of female probationers were identified as mentally ill (Ditton, 1999). This is compared to only 16% of male prison and jail inmates and 15% of male probationers being identified as having a mental health problem (Ditton, 1999). It must be noted, however, that female offenders may be more readily diagnosed as mentally ill for problems such as depression, therefore creating a potential clinical bias. Female inmates are much more likely to be medicated while in prison (Morris, 1987; Ross & Fabiano, 1986). For example, female inmates are administered psychotropic drugs (tranquilizers) at ten times the rate of male inmates (Culliver, 1993).

The prevalence of mental health issues can again be correlated to the high levels of sexual abuse and drug use found in the female offender population. The interrelated nature of mental illness and drug abuse is difficult to characterize because the drug abuse may exacerbate otherwise hidden mental health problems or occur as a result of mental health problems. For example, research has shown that females tend to view their substance abuse problems more negatively than men, thus creating feelings of depression and low self esteem (Anderson et al.,

2002; Jainchill, Hawke, & Yagelka, 2000). There is also some evidence to suggest that female offenders use drugs in attempts to self-medicate for an undiagnosed mental health problem (Covington, 2001; Galbraith, 1998; Holtfreter & Morash, 2003).

Given the unique demands and needs of female offenders, it should not be assumed that risk and need function the same for females as they do for males. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that male and female offenders present the same types of difficulties for their officers.

Empirical Research

The supervision of women in the community corrections setting is an underexplored area of research. However, there are some notable studies that have examined issues of risk and need as they relate to female probationers. Norland and Mann's (1984) study of gender differences in violation of probation (VOP) reports is the first to examine the possible gendered nature of supervision in the community. The researchers examined VOPs and conducted interviews with probation officers to determine differences in the type and rate of VOPs, as well as issues of supervision difficulty.

While most officers in the study were reluctant to file violations of supervision for either gender, male offenders were more likely than female offenders to incur violations. When asked to explain the gender differences in VOPs, probation officers noted that they were hesitant to issue violations for female offenders because they typically have family responsibilities. Paternalistic beliefs toward women also factored into the low rates of violations filed by officers. One respondent stated that s/he was less willing to issue violations to a woman because "men are stronger than women ... you see them as little creatures, real delicate" (125). Differences in the type of violation were also noted, with male offenders being more likely to commit new offenses while on probation and female offenders being more likely to incur technical violations.

Difficulties in supervision were also explored in the study, and officers generally reported that female offenders tend to take up more of the correctional officers time, compared to male offenders. Additionally, probation officers reported that females tend to have more complex problems, compared to their male counterparts. Because of this, probation officers generally stated that they prefer to work with male offenders.

More recently, Seng and Lurigio (2005) examined probation officers' perceptions about the risks and needs of female offenders and the difficulties associated with the supervision of women on probation. When asked if they believed that male and female probationers had different needs, most probation officers (71%) reported that female offenders presented different needs compared to males, particularly in the areas of parenting, employment, abusive relationships, and substance abuse. Next, a subsample of the officers were asked if they felt prepared to address the various needs of female probationers. Most officers felt that they were not prepared to deal with the financial, housing, and medical needs, but about half of the sample believed they were at least somewhat prepared to address mental health problems. Finally, most felt prepared to deal with needs relating to domestic violence, substance abuse, and education/employment.

When asked about probation violations, most officers (61%) believed that male and female offenders presented equal risks in this area, 23% believed that women were less likely than men to violate, and 15% believed that females were more likely than men to violate conditions of supervision. While officers reported that the nature of probation violations were

similar for male and female offenders, they did believe that the motivations behind the violations were often different.

Lastly, officers were asked about the supervision difficulties associated with female offenders, compared to male offenders. Over half of the officers (55%) stated that female offenders were harder to supervise, 7% rated female offenders as being easier to supervise, and 38% believed that the level of difficulty between male and female offenders was about the same. The main reasons cited by officers for the increased supervision difficulty of female offenders were issues relating to parenting, addiction, and personal problems; however, a few officers cited difficulties with aggression and “attitude” among female offenders.

Results from this study suggest that men and women present different risks and needs while on probation, and gender can influence the perceived level of supervision difficulty. While this study represents an important contribution to the literature, more research is needed in this area. Specifically, it is unknown how issues such as communication, lying, and aggression influence the perceived level of supervision difficulty for both male and female offenders in the community corrections setting.

METHODOLOGY

The data for the current study consisted of survey responses gathered from community corrections officers from Orange County, Florida. The Orange County community corrections department supervises an average daily population of over 8,000 offenders and employs 104 community corrections officers and supervisors. Data collection took place over a three-month period and consisted of a self-administered questionnaire designed to measure community corrections officers’ perceptions about the classification and supervision of male and female offenders.²

The researcher traveled to all community corrections units on multiple occasions to administer the survey to groups of officers. The researcher attended staff meetings and shift briefings for the units and distributed the survey to the officers at the conclusion of the meetings. Some officers were not present at these meetings so it was necessary to make appointments with those officers and administer the survey individually. Instructions were provided to all respondents prior to the administration of the questionnaire, and the researcher was present during the completion of the survey to answer any questions. The survey was confidential, and respondents were informed that all personal identifiers would be removed prior to data analysis. Respondents were also assured that none of their individual responses would be shared with the county management. In total, 93 officers and supervisors completed the survey, representing a response rate of 89%. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are reported in Table 1 (next page).

2. The researcher developed two versions of a questionnaire to measure the perceived differences between male and female offenders in the areas of risk, need, and supervision difficulty. While many questions were identical on each survey, one version of the survey contained questions about female offenders, and the other version contained identical questions but with the gender in some of the questions changed to assess the officers’ experience with male offenders.

TABLE 1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

	N	%
Gender		
Female	66	71
Male	27	29
Total	93	100
Race		
African American	27	31.0
Asian	2	2.3
Caucasian	49	56.3
Hispanic	6	6.9
Other	3	3.4
Total	87	100
Educational Attainment		
Some junior college, but did not earn a degree	8	9.1
Associates degree (AA)	2	2.3
More than 2 years of college, but did not earn a bachelors degree	11	12.5
Bachelors degree	38	43.2
Some graduate courses, but did not earn graduate degree	16	18.2
Graduate degree	13	14.8
Total	88	100
Department of Employment		
Work Release	5	5.4
Community Surveillance Unit	7	7.5
Pre-trial Services	26	28.0
Diversion Services	7	7.5
Probation	31	33.3
Intake Unit	8	8.6
Alternative Community Service	5	5.4
Administration	4	4.3
Total	93	100.0
Employment at another correctional agency		
Yes	29	34.1
No	56	65.9
Employment as a community corrections officer for another agency		
Yes	8	27.6
No	21	72.4

(Table continued on next page.)

TABLE 1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS (CONTINUED)

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	43.88	9.09
Employment Characteristics		
Number of years employed by OCCD	12.02	8.69
Number of years employed as a correctional officer by OCCD	9.53	8.04
Number of years employed by another correction agency, besides OCCD	10.79	8.24
Number of years employed as a correctional officer at another agency besides OCCD	8.44	5.17

RESULTS

Perceptions of Differential Risk

A variety of approaches to the measurement of perceptions of differential risk are examined. First, respondents were asked if they believe that the risk posed by male and female offenders is generally the same. Given the previous research on offending patterns and recidivism, it was expected that most officers would indicate that the likelihood of recidivism is not equal across gender. Results from this question supported that expectation, as 72.5% of officers responded that they do not believe that men and women present an equal risk of recidivism (Table 2).

TABLE 2. PERCEPTIONS OF DIFFERENTIAL RISK DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Do you believe that the risk of recidivism posed by male and female offenders is generally the same?		
No	66	72.5
Yes	25	27.5
Total	91	100
Do you feel more comfortable decreasing the supervision level of a male or a female offender?		
Female	7	8.4
Male	2	2.2
No Difference	74	89.2
Total	83	100
On average, which factors (risk or need) most affect the way you supervise offenders?		
Risk	64	79
Need	17	21
Total	81	100

Next, respondents were asked if they feel more comfortable decreasing the supervision level of a male offender or a female offender, assuming that relevant factors such as offense history and current offense are the same. An overwhelming majority of respondents (89.2%) reported that gender does not play a role in the decision to increase or decrease an offender’s supervision level as long as all other factors are identical (Table 2).

When asked which factors, risk or need, most affect the way they supervise offenders, most respondents (79%) reported that risk factors have the largest influence on supervision (Table 2). Respondents were provided with space to explain their answer to this question, and some officers were able to shed additional light on these findings. According to one officer, “the department has deemed [that] offenders will be supervised first based on risk and then the only needs addressed are employment.” Another respondent stated, “our system does not take the ‘needs’ into account, which is why there is such a high violation rate. Often needs outweigh the risk, but we supervise based on risk only.”

A differential risk index comprised of three Likert scale questionnaire items provided the next measure of differential risk. Respondents were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: 1) female offenders are more likely than male offenders to successfully complete their term of supervision; 2) male offenders are more likely than female offenders to incur a technical violation of supervision; and 3) male offenders are more likely than female offenders to violate their term of supervision with a new arrest. To determine whether the items could be combined to form an index, a reliability analysis was run, and results revealed an alpha coefficient of .69, which is above the acceptable cut-off point of .60 (Gronlund, 1981). As shown in Table 3 (below), 31% of respondents agreed somewhat, and 4.6% agreed strongly with the statement that female offenders are more likely than male offenders to successfully complete supervision, and there was a high level of agreement among respondents when asked about new arrest violations, with 50.6% of respondents agreeing somewhat and 12.6% agreeing strongly with that statement.

TABLE 3. DIFFERENTIAL RISK DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

	Disagree Strongly	Disagree Somewhat	Uncertain	Agree Somewhat	Agree Strongly
Female offenders are more likely than male offenders to successfully complete their term of supervision.	6.9%	16.1%	41.4%	31.0%	4.6%
Male offenders are more likely than female offenders to incur a technical violation of supervision.	8.2%	25.9%	29.4%	34.1%	2.4%
Male offenders are more likely than female offenders to violate their term of supervision with a new arrest.	2.3%	13.8%	20.7%	50.6%	12.6%

Perceptions of Differential Need

To measure differential need, respondents were first asked if they believe that the needs posed by male and female offenders are generally the same. The distribution was almost equally divided, with 50.5% reporting that they *do not* believe the needs are the same and 49.5% responding that the needs of male and female offenders are the same. This finding was somewhat unexpected given that previous research in this area, albeit limited, has noted that most officers believe that female offenders present different needs than their male counterparts (Seng & Lurigio, 2005).

A differential need index comprised of a series of Likert scale questionnaire items dealing with issues salient for female offenders provided another measure of differential need. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the items on a five-point scale. The following items were included on the survey: 1) Compared to male offenders, female offenders are more likely to require some form of substance abuse treatment. 2) Compared to male offenders, female offenders are more likely to require some form of parenting treatment. 3) Compared to male offenders, female offenders are more likely to require some form of mental health treatment. 4) I am more likely to refer a male offender for vocational programming than a female offender. 5) I have more knowledge about female offenders' personal/family relationships than male offenders' personal relationships (α for this index equals .685). As shown in Table 4 (below), respondents tended to disagree with the statements. The exception to this, however, is the item pertaining to parenting treatment, with 49.4% of respondents agreeing somewhat or agreeing strongly with the statement.

TABLE 4. DIFFERENTIAL NEED DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

	Disagree Strongly	Disagree Somewhat	Uncertain	Agree Somewhat	Agree Strongly
Compared to male offenders, female offenders are more likely to require some form of substance abuse treatment	14.6%	37.1%	31.5%	13.5%	3.4%
Compared to male offenders, female offenders are more likely to require some form of parenting treatment.	11.5%	19.5%	19.5%	35.6%	13.8%
Compared to male offenders, female offenders are more likely to require some form of mental health treatment.	13.8%	21.8%	36.8%	21.8%	5.7%
I am more likely to refer a male offender for vocational programming than a female offender.	31.0%	27.6%	24.1%	14.9%	2.3%
I have more knowledge about female offenders' personal/family relationships than male offenders' personal relationships.	11.6%	24.4%	23.3%	36.0%	4.7%

Supervision Difficulty

To measure supervision difficulty, officers were first asked how challenging female offenders were to supervise compared to male offenders.³ The provided responses ranged from 1 (Fe/males are much less challenging) to 5 (Fe/males are much more challenging). Table 5 (below) reports the descriptive statistics and bivariate analysis for supervision difficulty. Officers reported that female offenders are slightly more challenging to supervise, compared to male offenders ($\mu=3.24$ for females and $\mu= 2.97$ for males). However, bivariate analysis revealed no statistically significant relationship between gender and supervision difficulty on this item.

TABLE 5. SUPERVISION DIFFICULTY DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND BIVARIATE CORRELATION

	Female Survey			Male Survey			r	sig.
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N		
Overall difficulty	3.24	1.01933	41	2.97	1.07771	38	-0.140	.109
Communication	2.32	.93443	44	3.52	1.04153	42	0.543	.000**
Emotional expression of problems/needs	3.14	1.32228	44	2.86	1.27970	42	-0.112	.153
Lying	3.12	.54377	43	3.29	.74980	41	0.155	.080
Manipulation	3.12	.74980	41	3.07	1.17026	41	-0.060	.296
Possessing Loose Morals	2.83	.44173	41	3.07	.72077	41	0.166	.069
Complexity of needs	3.58	.76322	43	2.57	.85946	42	-0.548	.000**
Verbal Expressions of aggression	2.54	.73513	43	3.71	.91826	42	0.584	.000**
Physical Expression of aggression	2.25	.78132	44	3.93	.97262	42	0.709	.000**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

Officers who reported that offenders were much less or much more challenging to supervise were asked to explain their answer. The majority of the open-ended responses to this question (n = 12) came from officers who believed that females are more difficult to supervise, compared to males. The following are a few explanations from officers:

- They [females] “try to use their children to manipulate, and they cry much more than males.”
- “Females tend to be more emotional, make snap decisions, and family matters often interfere with good decision making.”
- “Male offenders don’t arrive on supervision with ‘emotional baggage’ like female offenders.”

3. This question was paired by gender, and the male version of the survey asked respondents: Based on your experiences, how challenging, compared to female offenders, is supervising male offenders?

A few respondents did indicate that females were much less challenging to supervise than their male counterparts. For example, one officer stated, “females in my opinion are less of a threat physically. Females generally have much less violent charges or histories than males.” Finally, one officer expressed an ambivalence in responding stating that “overall, many women are more apt to cooperate and not confront officers, but as a male officer in the field the issue of sexuality makes some females more challenging.”

The next measure of supervision difficulty took the form of an index in which respondents were asked how difficult offenders were to supervise in specific dimensions of supervision ($\alpha = .653$). Differences in the level of supervision difficulty were noted in several areas. Respondents reported that male offenders are more challenging to supervise than female offenders in the areas of communication ($\mu = 3.52$ for males and $\mu = 2.32$ for females), verbal expressions of aggression ($\mu = 3.71$ for males and $\mu = 2.54$ for females), and physical expression of aggression ($\mu = 3.93$ for males and 2.25 for females). Conversely, respondents reported that female offenders are more difficult to supervise than male offenders due to the complexity of their needs ($\mu = 3.58$ for females and $\mu = 2.57$ for males).

As shown in Table 5, bivariate analysis revealed a relationship between gender of the offender and perceived supervision difficulty in the areas of *communication* ($p < .0001$), *verbal expressions of aggression* ($p < .0001$), *physical expressions of aggression* ($p < .0001$), and *complexity of needs* ($p < .0001$). Results from an independent samples t-test (see Table 6, below) revealed significant differences in the perceived level of supervision difficulty between male and female offenders in the aforementioned areas, as well as the *possessing loose morals* item ($p = .034$).

TABLE 6. SUPERVISION DIFFICULTY INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST

	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>
Overall difficulty	1.145	77	.128	.27022
Communication	-5.656	84	.000	-1.20563
Emotional expression of problems/ needs	.994	84	.162	.27922
Lying	-1.239	82	.110	-.17640
Manipulation	.206	82	.419	.04311
Possessing Loose Morals	-1.847	80	.034	-.24390
Complexity of needs	5.732	83	.000	1.00997
Verbal Expressions of aggression	-6.545	83	.000	-1.17940
Physical Expression of aggression	-8.843	84	.000	-1.67857

In summary, respondents reported that there are differences in the level of supervision difficulty for male and female offenders, though the findings run contrary to the proposed expectation and previous research in this area (see for example Seng & Lurigio, 2005). Respondents revealed that male offenders pose more challenges than their female counterparts. Communication was defined as the willingness to share details of their personal life, and respondents reported that male offenders are more difficult in this area. This difficulty seems to arise because male offenders do not share such details and are generally reluctant to communicate with their officers. As one officer stated in a conversation following survey completion,

“Male offenders do not tell us that they are having a problem until it is too late.” This finding was unanticipated because previous research has found that correctional workers in the juvenile setting find males to be more open and straightforward than females (Baines & Adler, 1996). Unexpected findings also occurred when respondents were asked how challenging female offenders were to supervise in the area of manipulation. On the surface, it appears that respondents believe that there are no differences between male and female offenders in this area; however, previous research indicates that correctional staff generally perceive females to be more manipulative than their male counterparts (Bains & Adler, 1996; Bond-Maupin, Maupin, & Leisenring, 2002; Gaarder, Rodrigueaz, & Zatz, 2004).

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

It was hypothesized that community corrections officers would perceive female offenders as posing less risk than male offenders, and the results support that assumption. Many officers (41.4%) were uncertain when asked whether female offenders were more likely to successfully complete their term of supervision compared to male offenders. However, when asked about violations of supervision that involved new arrests, the majority of officers (63.2%) believed that male offenders were more likely than female offenders to incur that type of violation. Differential need was also examined, and some needs are considered more important for female offenders, compared to male offenders. For example, when asked whether female offenders are more likely than male offenders to require some form of parenting treatment, almost half (49.4%) of the respondents agreed that females present more need in this area. Results also indicate that men present difficulties for their officers due to a lack of communication and a propensity for violence, both verbal and physical. Women present difficulties for officers as well, but mainly due to their complex needs. These differences could signal that a gender-responsive approach to supervision might be warranted.

A gender responsive approach in corrections involves recognition that there are differences between male and female offenders, both in their pathways to criminality and in the needs presented by each group (Berman, 2005; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003). Additionally, the gender responsive approach to supervision involves providing services to female offenders to best address their often complex needs (Berman, 2005).

A gender responsive approach to the supervision of female offenders in the community could manifest with specialized caseloads for female offenders. Given the resource limitations of most community corrections departments, providing specialized training to a handful of officers charged with the supervision of female offenders may prove to be a more viable option than providing training for all officers. These caseloads would resemble specialized caseloads that are common in felony state probation for drug offenders and sex offenders. With specialized caseloads, only officers with gender responsive training would supervise female offenders. These caseloads would aid in effective supervision and treatment of female offenders in the community, while still making the most efficient use of departmental resources. Some states have begun to implement these types of caseloads, and the results seem favorable. The Missouri Department of Corrections reports that recidivism rates for female offenders on gender specific parole caseloads are less than 10% (Berman, 2005).

This research represents a starting point in an important area of research and serves as a foundation for future investigations into how gender shapes the supervision of offenders in the

community. There is still much that we do not know about the supervision of female offenders in the community. As such, further research is needed to explore how gender shapes the process of classification, as well as how the difficulties involved in the supervision of both men and women shape the supervision experience of offenders in the community.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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