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Texas Risk Assessment System (TRAS) - An Analysis of Post Incarcerated Females

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Walden University

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Rebecca Pastrana

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Texas Risk Assessment System (TRAS) - An Analysis of Post Incarcerated Females

by

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MA, New Mexico State University, 2003

BS, University of Texas at El Paso, 1982

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

November 2021

Abstract

Prediction of recidivism and risk has become one of the most important elements of an effective assessment in the U.S. prison system. Assessments conducted in the state of Texas prior to 2014 were not gender specific to female offenders. In 2015, Texas introduced a new risk/assessment tool known as Texas Risk Assessment System (TRAS) to identify and address differences in male and female offenders. The importance of the TRAS is that it helps identify female offenders' needs, motivations, and factors that contribute to their reoffending. TRAS helps determine who requires higher levels of supervision, treatment, and/or other services. This quantitative study used secondary data and a chi-square test to determine which assessment correctly identified the number of female offenders who recidivated and returned to prison during the years prior to TRAS, 1 year after, and 3 years later. The results found no statistical significance in the first year of its implementation. However, in the 3 years after, the data revealed a statistical significance in identifying female offender recidivism rates. The theoretical framework for the study was feminist legal theory, which helped to explain why females in the correctional setting have not been treated as equally as male offenders. Correcting the assessment of female offenders can help reform policy and sentencing to determine who requires higher levels of supervision, needs of treatment, and/or other services. TRAS can potentially transition personnel out of the system who are low-risk female offenders. Recommendations include implementation of TRAS throughout the criminal justice system in Texas. These findings may contribute to positive social change by improving treatment and services with the outcome of reducing recidivism for female offenders.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, especially my parents; Mom and Dad, thank you for the years of tireless support and encouragement. Thank you for believing in me before I believed in myself and for pushing me to succeed. Without you, I would never have made it to this point, and I am eternally grateful for your love and support.

To my wonderful children, Brianna and Alexander, you are my greatest accomplishment and I am very proud of who you are and grateful to be your mom.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Across the United States, there are racial and economic issues along with gender disparities found within the prison populations (Sawyer, 2018). Since 2009, the female prison population has been growing even though many states have instituted new reforms, resulting in lowering the male prison populations. These reforms have included incorporating new assessment tools that help filter low-risk offenders from either entering prison altogether or completely avoiding entering the criminal justice system. However, Texas is one of the states where reforms have been slow to institute (Sawyer, 2018). In Texas, the female incarceration rate has grown by 500% since 2009, making it one of the top 10 highest female incarceration rates in the United States (Texas Department of Criminal Justice [TDCJ], 2018). The TDCJ (2018) correctional system reported that the increase of female incarceration rates has increased 908% over the last 36 years. In comparison, the male population has decreased by 396% over the same period (TDCJ, 2018). Nationwide, in 2016, the Texas Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) released information that the female prison population had increased by about 700 inmates from 2009 (BJS, 2017). Examining the rationale for these state trends is critical for making state-level policy choices that dictate the future of female incarceration rates and by extension addresses recidivism. In this chapter, I discuss and examine the basic understanding of the background, problem, and nature of the study.

Background of the Study

While any incarceration of women is harmful to the family unit, it is also damaging and wasteful to society. The nation's understanding of women's incarceration

issues suffers from the relative scarcity of gender-specific data, analysis, and discourse. As the number of women in prisons and jails continues to increase in Texas, even as the number of men falls, it is important to understand this dramatic growth in female incarceration rates. In this study, I focused on the new Texas Risk Assessment System (TRAS) developed and instituted by the TDCJ in early 2015. I analyzed and compared both old and new statistical data to evaluate if recidivism rates have decreased for the female ex-offender population due primarily to the implementation of TRAS in 2015 and its predecessor assessment known as the Wisconsin Tool. Because this assessment tool established a new and separate assessment geared toward the female offender population, the research questions addressed the potential need to reverse the female prison population growth in Texas. The social implications of the study include helping policy makers reassess TRAS or developing a better comprehensive program that can help lower the female incarceration rates and allow female offenders the opportunity to become and remain productive members of society.

Problem Statement

This study focused on female-offender post incarceration in Texas to assess whether the newly implemented TRAS has affected recidivism rates. I explored the recidivism rates of female offenders in Texas and whether TRAS has had a positive influence. The results of the study can influence public policy and help access the success of new state and local policies in the area of reentry and treatment requirements for female offenders. If an issue in recidivism is validated within the study, then it can provide recommendations that may lead to the reduction in recidivism rates. The

literature review includes an explanation of the evolution of the 4th generation of the risk assessment instrument that the TDCJ implemented in 2015, known as TRAS. They explained the concept of this risk assessment instrument and its importance in identifying what works in the correctional system to lower recidivism. The literature review also addresses the importance of using a valid risk assessment tool specifically made for the female offender population to correctly assess their risk in recidivism. The literature review also reveals the importance of supervising the female offender population according to their risk level of reoffending. Moreover, I identify the importance of assessing the female offender by gender specific needs, which differ greatly than those of the male offender, and may also lead to lower recidivism rates.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to validate the new risk/need assessment tool and understand whether it properly assesses female parolee's risk levels, which can help to identify their likelihood of recidivating. I focused on the female offender post incarceration in Texas and determined if the new assessment tool (TRAS) correctly identified female offender risk factors from the prior year's assessment tool (Wisconsin; independent variables) uniquely affecting their recidivism (dependent variable). The results of the study can potentially influence public policy and affect positive social change, as it could help stakeholders assess, create, and implement new state and local policies in the area of reentry requirements and treatment for female offenders that can subsequently lead to the reduction in recidivism rates.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided the study are included below. The purpose of research questions was to assist in analyzing the problem of how risk influences recidivism. The null hypothesis is the opposite of the research question as it states that no relationship exists among the variables. The alternative hypothesis states that there is a relationship between two variables but opposite of the research question.

Research Question (RQ) 1: Which assessment tool from 2014 or 2015 has impacted recidivism rates on post incarcerated female offenders in Texas?

H_01 : TRAS has not reduced the recidivism rate of female offenders since implementation in 2015.

H_a1 : TRAS has reduced recidivism among the post incarcerated female offender population.

RQ2: Are TRAS risk scores for female offenders better at determining risk levels, thereby lowering recidivism rates 3 years after its implementation?

H_02 : TRAS is not identifying risk scores differently than in prior years in female offenders in Texas.

H_a2 : TRAS is identifying risk scores differently than in prior years in female offenders in Texas.

Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study was feminist legal theory (see Ferguson, 2017). This theory helped to explain and validate the research questions concerning the reliability of using a new risk assessment tool on post incarcerated female

offenders. The TRAS used for the first time in Texas has a stated intent to identify and reduce recidivism among this growing female prison population. Feminist legal theory is based on the female perspective that the law's treatment of women in relation to men has not been equal or fair (Conaghan & Russell, 2015). One of the goals of feminist legal theory consists of understanding and exploring the female experience, determining if law and institutions oppose or negatively affect females, and analyzing what changes need to occur. The feminist legal theory informed the public policy that guided this research because it addresses the social welfare of the target population. The target group was female offenders post incarceration, also known as parolees. These female offenders prior to 2015 were assessed using the same risk assessment as male offenders. The feminist theory helped to assess the reliability of the new assessment tool, and the research data helped shed light on the potential influence on recidivism rates. Much of the current research and theory is premised on basic assumptions about gender differences, combined with the idea that maleness represents the norm (Miller & Carbone-Lopez, 2015). However, female offenders often have different social, medical, and criminological profiles than their male counterparts (Bartlett et al., 2015). Feminist theory illuminates the struggles faced by female inmates in the United States and explains how they are distinctly different from the struggles faced by male inmates.

Nature of the Study

This study was quantitative in nature and evaluated the validity of TRAS in addressing effectiveness of female offender recidivism rates in Texas between 2015 and 2018. This quantitative study also validated TRAS's goal of correctly assessing and

differentiating female and male risk levels that cause reoffending. In this quantitative study, I analyzed post assessment tools administered by parole officers on female offenders from years 2014 and new assessment tool implemented in Texas in 2015. A chi-square statistical test was used to analyze the data. This test measured if there was a statistically significant correlation found among the two variables tested. In this study, the independent variables tested were two different assessment tools from 2014 and 2015, which were used to identify female risk factors, and the dependent variable was recidivism. The final analysis of the chi-square statistics validated TRAS success rates. Subsequently, the study results could help public policy makers implement further changes for female offenders in Texas.

Definitions

The following terms were used in this study. These terms require a specialized definition to increase the understanding and values of the research. For readers' convenience, these terms are defined here.

Ex-offender: An ex-offender is any individual released from prison and returned or reintegrated back into society (BJS, 2017).

Parole or supervised release: A period of time where an ex-offender lives under supervision and under a set of government mandated conditions or rules. Violations of these conditions could result in re-arrest and recidivism (BJS, 2017).

Probationer: A person who has been convicted of a crime by either the state or federal court system and is allowed to remain in the community while serving their sentence under the supervision of both the court and supervising officer (BJS, 2017).

Recidivism: Repeating or returning to criminal behavior, criminal behavior resulting in the rearrest, reconviction, or return to prison (BJS, 2017).

Reentry: A term used to refer to programs, services, and/or issues related to the ex-offender transitioning back into the community after release from prison. These programs are found within the community where the offender is released and resides (BJS, 2017).

Risk: A term used to identify the probability of reoffending.

Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ): The TDCJ is the agency responsible for the supervision of all female offenders after release from prison (TDCJ, 2015).

Texas Risk Assessment System (TRAS): The TRAS is used in Texas to assess both male and female offenders to determine their risk levels of reoffending. TRAS was implemented in Texas in early 2015 to help assess risk level of reoffending (TDCJ, 2015).

Assumptions

In this study, the reliance on several assumptions, including that all the statistical data provided on and from the TDCJ Executive Services through the Public Information Office, is assumed to be current, accurate, and correct. I also assumed that all statistics were gathered during the years of 2014, 2015, and 2018 in the same manner. One assumption from the implementation of TRAS in 2015 was the downward trend of female offenders returning to prison within the next 3 years. Moreover, I assumed that the entire statistical data set's information used in this study was reliable, consistent, and

valid. I also assumed that the study would add to the existing literature on the topics of risk and recidivism rates for female offenders and would be of value to interested parties, for example, to TDCJ parole and reintegration divisions.

Scope and Delimitations

Several factors delimited the study. First, in the study, I focused primarily on female ex-offenders within the state of Texas. Second, I relied on a secondary data set used from TDCJ records and their website. This data set is open-sourced and uploaded in an annual statistical report every August onto their website. The numbers of recidivating offenders were combined by gender in their statistical report, and for the study, permission was obtained from TDCJ Executive Services Public Information Office for the female offender data. Third, this study was limited to analyzing data from the 2014 recidivism rate and then compared with the recidivism rates in 2018. Therefore, the results of the study were generalized only to the female offenders' population in the state of Texas. Feminist theory (Conaghan & Russell, 2015) enabled me to account for all risk factors contributing to criminal behavior in female offenders. Because feminist theory was a solid foundation for this study based on the research questions and the female offender population, the findings may only be relevant for the specific female offender population found in Texas. Even when female offenders with similar characteristics are studied in other states in a similar risk and recidivism study, these risk factor settings may offer different statistical analysis to similar research questions. However, the findings could be useful for future research with female offenders when aimed at the particular

themes identified in this study. The findings of this study are not relevant to a male population, even in similar circumstances.

Limitations

Limitations to the study included analyzing data based on statistics from the TDCJ Executive Services-PIO. One of the main issues with the study was the lack of information due to the female incarceration rates solely based on reoffending (committing another crime) or simply returning to the prison due to committing a technical rule infraction while “on supervision” in a parole status. In other words, it is unknown what exact rule infraction or technical violation the female offender committed that caused her violation and subsequent return to prison. The validity of the study, or rather the accuracy of the results, was a limitation in itself because results could vary from state-to-state due in part to the varied and different female populations and the differing incarceration rates. It is unknown if the study conducted in another state would produce the same or similar results.

Significance

Over the past quarter century, there has been a profound change in the involvement of women within the criminal justice system across the United States, including Texas. This is the result of more expansive law enforcement efforts, stiffer drug sentencing laws, and post-conviction barriers to reentry that uniquely affect women (Yesburg et al., 2015). Women now comprise a larger proportion of the prison population than ever before in the United States (Yesburg et al, 2015). The growth of the female prison population stands nearly 8 times higher than the male population within the United

States (Yesburg, et al., 2015) Women in state prisons are more likely than men to be incarcerated for a drug or property offense. Twenty-four percent of female prisoners have been convicted of a low-level drug offense. The mass incarceration of women is harmful, wasteful, and counterproductive to society. Nevertheless, the nation's understanding of women's incarceration suffers from the relative scarcity of gender-specific data, analysis, and discourse. Prior to Texas's implementation of TRAS in 2015, both male and female offenders were assessed in the same manner using an antiquated Wisconsin risk assessment instrument mentioned earlier as the Wisconsin Tool. The rationale for using the same tool was due to the historical low number of female offenders on parole. This study helps to validate if this new risk assessment tool is effectively identifying female risk factors from those of the prior year's assessment tool in identifying those female offenders who are at risk of reoffending in Texas. The study addressed issues of the new risk assessment implemented by the state of Texas on female parolees and its validity in predicting recidivism. Although the new risk assessment has been studied on probationers in Texas, researchers have not studied its effectiveness on parolees. Despite the proliferation of male offender studies and various risk assessments, only a few have addressed the importance of assessing the female population separately and as a stand-alone population. There was also a gap in the literature concerning risk assessment accuracy of predicting recidivism rates on female offenders.

Summary

In this study, I highlight the issues of female recidivism rates. I focus on the factors that have caused the mass incarceration of women as cyclical, harmful, and

counterproductive. I also highlight the need for the criminal justice system to implement and fund programs specifically designed to assist female reentry efforts back into society, based on TRAS risk levels. Building more women's prisons is not the answer, but creating new reforms to keep women from returning to the criminal justice system may be a more effective solution. Therefore, it is necessary to have an assessment tool created solely to determine correct risk levels of reoffending for post incarcerated female offenders.

The Chapter 2 literature review is related to the challenges and experiences that female offender's face before and after their experiences in the Texas criminal justice system. The literature review also reveals the new risk assessment system being used to lower recidivism rates for female offenders in the state of Texas. Chapter 3 addresses the research methodology selected to respond to the problem and set the stage of analysis and deeper understanding. In Chapter 4, I present the data collection, analysis, and results. In Chapter 5, I present the study's result, conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this study, I focused on the female offender post incarceration in Texas to assess whether the newly implemented TRAS has affected recidivism rates. The results of the study could influence public policy as the results could help to create and implement new state and local policies in the area of reentry and treatment requirements, specifically for female offenders, that could subsequently lead to the reduction in recidivism rates. For over 30 years, the state of Texas used a Wisconsin assessment tool to determine post incarceration supervision risk levels for both male and female offenders. However, this outdated assessment did not assess the female offender any differently than that of male offenders (TDCJ, 2015). The old Wisconsin tool asked questions in reference to criminal history, education, substance abuse, job skills, history and marital status (TDCJ, 2015). Depending on the salient factor score, the female offender was supervised accordingly either high, medium, or low according to their risk level (TDCJ, 2015). Beginning in 2015, the state of Texas addressed assessing female offenders with a new assessment tool known as the TRAS (2015). The TRAS is used to lower female recidivism rates.

In the literature review, I address current female recidivism rates in the United States and explain the rationale for the new assessment tool being used in Texas based on the high prison population. I used the feminist legal theory to explain why women are treated differently than men in the criminal justice system.

Literature Search Strategy

This review was conducted using articles, journals, and books on the research topic of female recidivism rates, risk levels assessment tools, and related topics. I used manuals and articles obtained through an online search of the following databases: ProQuest Search Premiere and Criminal Justice Articles. I used various libraries available through Walden and the University of Texas. The following key words were used: *female offenders, female prisoners, female inmates, risk assessment, recidivism, institutional adjustment, feminist legal theory, gendered pathways, and criminal theory models*. After the initial key word search, more specific searches were conducted. Further articles were explored from reference lists of researched articles and bibliographies related to correctional assessment tools and male and female offenders. Statistical information was gathered from searches of the Bureau of Justice website and the Texas Department of Corrections website.

Theoretical Framework

While there are many theories attempting to explain why females commit crime, there are no current theories to explain the rise in female recidivism rates post incarceration in Texas. However, the feminist legal theory, also known as feminist jurisprudence, is based on the belief that the law has been fundamental in women's historical subordination (Ferguson, 2017). The feminist legal theory contains two concepts. Even though the first concept was not the basis for my theoretical framework, it is worth mentioning as the second concept arose because of the interpretation to the first concept. First, feminist legal theory seeks to explain ways in which the law has played a

role in shaping women's subordinate status (Ferguson, 2017). Secondly and most importantly, feminist legal theory seeks to change women's status through a reworking of the law and its approach to gender (Ferguson, 2017). The feminists' legal theory is often viewed as a critique of U.S. law and how its themes are male dominated and neglect the treatment of women in similar circumstances. The basic idea behind the feminist legal theory is to change the way women are treated and how judges have applied the law to keep women in a subordinate position (Ferguson, 2017). Most feminist legal theorists have used this theory in the context that women's subordinate position in society is based on gender assumptions that are then transferred to the criminal justice system.

Feminist theory originated in 1792 when Wollstonecraft penned her essay, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (as cited in Lewis, 2017). Wollstonecraft maintained that women are human beings deserving of the same fundamental rights as men (Wollstonecraft & Ward, 1996; Lewis, 2017). Wollstonecraft and Ward (1996) wrote in their essay that women have the same thoughts and capabilities that equal those of men and therefore should be granted the same opportunities. She also argued for equal education for both men and women. Since Wollstonecraft penned her essay in the late 1700s, many other activists and writers have added to her original body of work, which has laid the foundation for various feminist-focused theories (Lewis, 2017).

Although the focus in this study was on the assessment completed when a female offender reenters society from prison, using the feminist theory acknowledges and encompasses more risk factors than simple gender differences. Throughout the evolution of the feminists' legal theory, many writers and scholars have evolved the theory to

change how women have been viewed throughout history. In 1963, Freidan wrote about the female problem and declared female independence, taking the women's rights movement several steps forward (as cited in Lewis, 2017). She challenged the idea that a woman's identity was defined through her status of being a mother and wife. She called for women to be seen as their own individuals.

In this study, feminist theory was used to highlight women's experiences and perspectives in modern times. Throughout history, many feminist theorists have focused on issues, trends, and problems that may be misunderstood or overlooked by traditional, male-dominated culture. Feminist theory encompasses a range of issues, including gender differences, gender inequality, gender oppression, and structural oppression (Cole, 2017). Most often, prisons and jails have overlooked issues that are specific to female inmates (McPhail et al., 2012). Women are often treated using programs that have been designed for men in the criminal justice system, and their gender-specific needs are not subsequently considered. Generalizations made about the male inmate population cannot be generalized to that of the female population because of their differences in social, physical, and psychological needs (Bartlett et al., 2015; Van Voorhis, 2012). These differences between genders include but are not limited to personality factors to include speech patterns, how each response to stress, and mental health (Harrison et al., 2015). The feminist theory has been used to demonstrate the importance of using gender specific approaches to treatment of female offenders. The essence of the feminist theory is aimed at achieving justice, equality, and freedom for all individuals, regardless of gender, race, or social status (Conlin, 2017; Ferguson, 2017).

In a response to the differences that many have observed in female and male offenders, Holtfreter and Wattanaporn (2014) wrote that Daly (1994) introduced the concept of a gendered pathway theory and, although not used in this study, is worth mentioning as Daly believed that the notable differences in levels of criminal behavior committed by gender were being ignored by legislation and the correctional system. Daly went on to identify many subtypes of female criminals as well as several precursors, which can lead females to commit crime. Much of today's research has been based on her findings, especially as to the differences why males and females commit crime, and the factors leading them have also gained momentum in the correctional system (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014). TRAS explores an assessment of those traits that may lead a woman back to prison. Early identification of gender specific differences offers a chance for additional intervention and avoids the dual problem of either over or under classification of risk for recidivism, a common problem with most assessment tools previously used in the Texas correctional system.

The literature provides two primary approaches to explain female criminality. The first involved theories that have attempted to explain female criminality separately from those that explain theories of male criminality. These theories are often based on assumptions about the female identity and do not have empirical support. To date, there still exists limited research on recidivism and the problem of reintegration from a female ex-offender's perspective. Wetzler (2006) acknowledged that despite the efforts by a handful of researchers, the emotional, physical, and social issues facing female offenders

in the criminal justice system remain poorly understood, in part because they represent a minority of the inmate population (as cited in Lewis, 2017).

In order to provide a comprehensive review of the literature, it is important to look at the development and evolution of traditional theories to explain female criminality (Lewis, 2017). Some of the earliest work on women's crime focused on women's biology written by Lombroso and Ferrero (as cited in Lewis, 2017); they explain female criminality by stating that women are throwbacks to an earlier evolutionary state in human development. Much of the literature that followed continued to focus on biological or genetic and pathological theories to explain female criminality and continued into the 1960s. In the mid-1970s, as major societal and cultural changes occurred, female criminality was often explained as a by-product of the women's liberation movement (Lewis, 2017). Lewis (2017) mentioned that in the 70s, a rise in women's involvement in property crime was attributed to increased opportunities to enter previously male dominated occupations, such as banking and business. Cole (2017) criticized the liberation theory on the grounds that neither the status of women nor their patterns of offending had changed dramatically over time.

Current feminist researchers are examining other factors that relate to female criminality. For example, a tenet of the economic marginalization theory asserts that for women, it is the absence rather than the availability of employment opportunity that appears to lead to increased criminal behavior (Lewis, 2017). Other feminist theorists have claimed that most often women commit petty property crime as a response to poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and continuing monetary issues related to the

difference in pay between men and women. Proponents of this theory have suggested that the feminization of poverty, not women's liberation, is most relevant to women's criminality (Lewis, 2017).

An important point for this study of female theorists on criminality is based on research that revealed that a women's entry into crime has indicated that gender matters significantly in shaping criminality. Lewis (2017) and Ferguson (2017) noted that the "profound differences" between the lives of women and men shape their patterns of criminal offending. Among women, the most common reason to commit crime is based on physical survival and is often attributed to a form of domestic and substance abuse. Lewis wrote that in order to understand why women commit crime, one needs to view the whole female perspective. He conducted extensive interviews with women to further understand what life events placed girls and women at risk of criminal behavior. Most often, researchers have used presentence investigative reports to obtain exact information into the female criminal mind. Subsequently this strategy has helped researchers identify those factors that shape women's choices and behaviors. It is these differences into female criminal behavior that helped guide this literature review because feminist theory is aimed at achieving justice, equality, and freedom for all individuals, regardless of gender, race, or social status (see Conlin, 2017; Ferguson, 2017). The focus for the study and rationale for using the feminist legal theory was to illuminate how certain factors affect female offenders and how identifying and addressing these risk factors could help reduce the rate of recidivism. This study aligned with the tenets of feminist theory that address inequality found within the male dominated criminal justice system. The

importance of acknowledging that female offenders differ from the male offender overlooks gender differences and related needs.

Identifying Risk Factors

Modern research on female offenders has conclusively established that women enter the criminal justice systems in ways that are different from those of male offenders. The following differences have been empirically documented and include

1. The role of violence both inside and outside of prison (Lewis, 2017).
2. The impact of motherhood and its responsibilities for children and other dependent family members,
3. The general lack of job opportunities due to incomplete education, which reduces the ability to support self and children (Conlin, 2017; Ferguson, 2017).
4. Race and ethnicity and the impacts of these in terms of crime, violent partners, and substance abuse (Conlin, 2017, Ferguson, 2017).

Recent work on the totality of women's lives has revealed that due to gender, girls are at larger risk of experiencing sexual abuse, sexual assault, and home violence (Conlin, 2017). All of these risk factors assist to produce and sustain female criminality, and all these problems are individually discussed further below.

Histories of Abuse

Researchers have established that many female offenders have histories of sexual, emotional, substance, and/or physical abuse that occurs during their teens and is the subsequent cause of their juvenile delinquency, leading to their addiction and criminality (Stephenson et al., 2014). Many theorists have found a strong link to female offenders

having abusive families and relationships (Swan & Goodman-Delahunty, 2013). Researchers have thus learned that often girls run away to escape situations that involve violence, sexual abuse, and/or physical abuse. Then the females enter into the juvenile criminal system due to using or committing crimes, such as prostitution, property crimes, and illegal drug usage as a way of survival or coping. Researchers have learned that women experience higher rates of victimization than men before coming to prison (Stephenson et al., 2014). Often this victimization includes a combination of childhood neglect, physical abuse, and/or sexual abuse, or interpersonal violence perpetrated by romantic partners. A 2012 study conducted on 102 incarcerated women identified four types of victimization they all experienced prior to their incarceration. They included forced intercourse, forced molestation, physical violence with a weapon, and physical violence without a weapon (Lynch et al., 2012). Also identified in the study was that 32% experienced three of these types of victimization, and 25.5% experienced two types (Lynch et al., 2012). Only 10.8% reported that they had never been victimized in any way (Lynch et al., 2012). Once victimized, women are at risk for further abuse. In the same study, 90% of women reported that they had experienced violence at the hands of a romantic partner within the year preceding incarceration. Victimization often precedes substance abuse and mental health issues as well (Tripodi & Pettus-Davis, 2012).

Mental Illness and Substance Abuse

Another major factor that many incarcerated women suffer from is mental illness or mental disorder (BJS, 2017). According to the BJS (2017), nearly 73% of female offenders with a mental illness have also reported having experienced prior physical and

or sexual abuse. Although women are incarcerated at far lower rates than men, the number and percentage of incarcerated women have grown substantially in recent years. Between 2000 and 2008, the number of men incarcerated grew by 5%, while the number of incarcerated women grew by about 15% (Yesburg et al., 2015). Women in prison are likely to have different sets of problems and needs than men, presenting particular treatment challenges that may call for tailored approaches (Swan & Goodman-Delahunty, 2013). Researchers have shown that for female offenders, drug use typically precedes criminal behavior, whereas the opposite is true for men (Swan & Goodman-Delahunty, 2013). Most female offenders serving time in prison report having committed the offense to attain money to support a drug habit or to assist a partner's drug habit (Light et al, 2013). Many female offenders have reported they were introduced to drug use by a romantic partner or a family member, whereas male offenders were more likely introduced to drug use by peers (Yang et al., 2015). These differences in context and motivation for women's substance use have only recently been addressed in the literature (Kreis et al., 2016). Recent research has also shown that women are more likely to be incarcerated for nonviolent drug related crimes and property offenses (Kreis et al., 2016). Over 50% of female prisoners under many state jurisdiction were incarcerated for drug or property offenses (Bronson & Carson, 2019, p. 20). This is an increase of female offenders incarcerated for a drug offense from 12% in 1996 to 25% in 2017 (Bronson & Carson, 2019, p. 20). In fact, over 59% of female offenders in state prisons have acknowledged using drugs in the month prior to their offense (Bronson & Carson, 2019,

p. 21). In addition, female offenders tend to have more severe drug problems and use drugs more frequently than male offenders (Kreis et al., 2016).

Economic and Social Marginality

One factor facing women is their struggle to find legitimate work, and this often can lead them into criminal activity, and then participation with the criminal justice system (Sawyer, 2018). A significant proportion of female offenders in the criminal justice system have little education or work experience and significant histories of personal abuse (Sawyer, 2018). A result of severed social relations, economic vulnerability, addiction, abuse, and homelessness is a frequent complication in the lives of women involved in the criminal justice system (Sawyer, 2018). Many studies of female offenders found a significant correlation between relationships and criminal involvement (Sawyer, 2018). Female criminality often occurred due to their relationships with family members and significant others (Crowder, 2018). Women were often introduced to drugs by their significant others who continue to be their suppliers. As stated earlier, women were often introduced to drugs by their partners and then entered into prostitution in order to provide their partners with drugs or other resources and products. Unfortunately, if these females attempted to rid themselves of their drug habit it could lead to physical or emotional and/ or sexual abuse from their partner

In addition, female offenders who are also drug abusers were frequently marginalized by way of society because of race, class, and culture, as well as political policies that criminalize their behavior (e.g., the war on drugs) (Crowder, 2018). Females were far more likely than males to be motivated by relationship concerns for example

situational pressures such as threatened loss of valued relationships play a greater role in female offenders than their male counterparts (Crowder, 2018).

As a child, girls were socialized to be more compassionate than boys (Crowder, 2018). However, while incarcerated they were exposed to nonempathic relationships. As a result, the females may lack empathy for both self and others, or they may feel highly concerned for their fellow inmates but lack self-worth for themselves. Women need to experience and maintain positive relationships so as not to repeat their histories of loss, neglect, and abuse (Crowder, 2018).

Historically, most criminal justice policies ignore the importance of helping female offender keep their connections and relationships throughout imprisonment (Sawyer, 2018). Additionally, the concept of relationships goes unrecognized in the correctional setting. It is essential for female offender's successful reintegration into society for correctional agencies to understand the reasons why female commit crimes, their motivations and cause of criminal behaviors. Understanding the importance of maintaining familial relationships and connections leads to positive relationships both inside and outside the correctional setting and is indispensable to understanding the female offender risk factors to re offending.

It is vital that at an early age and throughout their lifetime, women learned and experienced wholesome relationships as part of the intervention process (Crowder, 2018). If women who enter the criminal justice system were to change, grow, and stop the cycle of reoffending, it is fundamental that they be in treatment programs and learning environments where relationships and mutuality are core elements. Therefore, it

is important that inside any prison or correctional institution there are programs available for women to establish healthy relationships with other inmates' and prison staff (Crowder, 2018). However, the criminal justice system is not designed to encourage women to form long lasting mutual beneficial relationships. Unfortunately, the modern prison system only seems to discourage women from trusting one another (Crowder, 2018). This trend stays with women upon release from prison where they continue to be discouraged or required from associating with other females who have been incarcerated, creating a further lack of continuity in relationships.

Prior research conducted in various States have shown the positive effects of allowing women in prison to form, work, and maintain positive relationships (Crowder, 2018). Research has shown that female offenders who positively engaged with one another, and the prison staff possess a more positive attitude upon release from incarceration (Crowder, 2018). In another study conducted a few years later in the Ohio Correctional System confirmed the findings that female offenders benefitted from establishing positive and mutually respectful relationships with the correctional staff. The mutual beneficial relationships help to encourage female offenders to feel powerful and to trust themselves instead of allowing others to have power over them (Crowder, 2018),

Women Offenders and Their Children

The most important relationship that needs to be analyzed concerns female offenders and their children. The most recent statistics' gathered show that an 80 percent of women offenders in the United States have a child or children under the age of eighteen (BJS, 2017). The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2017) reported the majority of women were

single mothers with an average of two children, were the main custodial parents prior to their arrest as cited by (Sawyer, 2018; Bloom & Steinhart, 1993). Many of these women felt guilt about being absent from their children's lives and wondered how to regain custody and support their children following their release (Sawyer, 2018). Sawyer (2018, p. 3) found that (54 percent) of the children of female offenders never visited their mothers while in prison. These issues to visitation were often the distance or location of the prison and lack of transportation. These barriers created problems substantial issues in maintain family bonds/ties and many issues reuniting with their children upon release (Sawyer, 2018).

Barnes and Cunningham-Stringer (2014) discussed the implications and many issues of motherhood among U.S. female offenders. They wrote that female offenders not only encountered many problems with trying to maintain a relationship with their children but had to fight barriers created by the both the correctional system and by child welfare agencies. Barnes and Cunningham-Stringer (2014) agreed with Sawyer (2018) that most of the problems female offenders with children faced were that geographical distance between the prison and the children's homes, a lack of transportation, and limited monetary resources. Sawyer (2018) found that an estimated four to nine percent of women are pregnant at the time of incarceration. These women who give birth while in prison are not usually allowed to spend quality time with the new born child therefore undermining the mother child bond.

Characteristics of Female Offenders

Statistics show that most incarcerated women are unmarried, between ages 25 and 34 years (Barnes & Cunningham-Stringer, 2014), and most importantly are mothers

(Miller et al., 2014). Incarcerated women are far more likely than incarcerated men to be the primary parent for at least one child before and after incarceration (Mapson, 2013). This places increased responsibility and pressure on incarcerated mothers. Upon reentry, mothers are more likely than fathers to have to juggle parenthood with work or training for a marketable skill. Female offenders tend to have higher rates of mental illness, substance abuse issues, and victimization perpetrated against them than their male counterparts (DeHart & Moran, 2015; Kerig, 2014; McDonald & Arlinghaus, 2014). Females also engage in more self-harming behaviors than males, and have higher rates of attempted suicide (Sherman, Mendel, & Irvine, 2013; Stephenson et al., 2014). Women released from prison tend to be less educated and have less earning potential than men released from prison (Mapson, 2013; Rabuy & Kopf, 2015). Barnes and Cunningham-Stringer (2014) found that more than half of incarcerated women in their study may have received money from illegal activities before incarceration. The desperation that comes from needing to survive and to provide for a family paired with prior experience of making money illegally highlights one of the dangers associated with recidivism that women may face when released. Women who are released from incarceration are also at increased risk for homelessness (Asberg & Renk, 2015). With fewer resources available to them mothers might also be confronted with making choices that lead to illegitimate ways of making money.

In an article by Sawyer (2018), she wrote that a female offender's entry into the criminal justice system differs than that of the male offender due to gendered impact of the war on drugs. A fuller understanding of how and why women enter into the criminal

justice system must include a look at the factors in the lives of the female offenders. These factors other than gender includes racial, cultural, ethnicity just to name a few these will be discussed individually and all have been to some extent proven to have an effect on women's lives quite differently than men's and it effects their lives in the criminal justice system.

Race and Ethnicity

In all cultures, female developmental experiences are different than those of their male counterparts (Sawyer, 2018). Regardless of their racial, ethnic or social class all of their life experiences are molded by their gender. Culture is often seen as a framework made up of values and beliefs which is then seen as a means of organizing experiences. It is important to acknowledge each women's uniqueness' in order to provide the necessary services and supervision for each female offender. "No two women exist in precisely the same situations and context, although each all exist in the circumstance as women" (Sawyer, 2018, p. 6). It is important to view and therefore assess each female offender individually instead of simply grouping them by way of gender. It is necessary to acknowledge cultural and other differences. For this reason, there is a need to view these varied differences in the lives of females due to differences found within cultural, ethnicities, sexual identity and age and not label or view them as the basic racial categories found on the census. The classifying of female offenders by their ethnicity is now always accurate either although there is a shared culture for example in a category of Hispanics which can include many types of ethnicities for example it would include Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, or Cubans just to name a few but each of these

ethnicities has their own cultural identity. The same can be said for Asian, or African American. There are differences as well associated with social class rich or poor each female experiences also differ. Any dialogue of ethnicity raises definitional and conceptual issues (Sawyer, 2018). Sawyer (2018), defines ethnicity by means of culture: and shared identity by means of a shared ideological, normative, and behavioral framework.

Unfortunately, even in today's U.S. society, there still exists an understanding and acceptance of racial and cultural differences that extends to the correctional setting and to its personnel. In other words, in this male dominant culture found in the criminal justice system, prison staff are ignorant of the issues women bring with them upon incarceration. Women faced many countless of differences experienced by them based on their ethnic and racial backgrounds, this includes patterns of alcohol and drug use, importance of their individual family ties, and role of motherhood. The importance of training correctional staff and administration personnel on cultural awareness is extremely necessary when working with female offenders entering the prison from a variety of different racial and cultural backgrounds. Issues can arise if these female offenders feel marginalized or oppressed due to the staff's cultural ignorance. This is especially true when correctional personnel allow cultural-biased skew their perceptions of their female offenders under their supervision in their facilities to dominate their views.

As stated earlier, the majority of female offenders in Texas are mothers, and their involvement in the criminal justice system leads many of them to substance or alcohol

abuse and could have follow-on repercussions in their ability to retain or maintain custody of their children upon release (Sawyer, 2018). This mother-child relationship may hold the most significant key for successful community reintegration and help to lower recidivism rates. Incarcerated female offenders tend to experience a sense of isolation and abandonment if upon entering the prison system their child is processed into the child welfare system and they then need to face the reality of completing losing their families altogether. Research demonstrates that both male and female offenders who maintain ties to their families and communities during incarceration are less likely to recidivate (Sawyer, 2018).

For many female offenders, a source of hope and motivation while under criminal justice supervision is the maintaining of their relationship to their children and family. The importance for the prison system is recognizing the importance of the female offenders' role as mothers provides in turn this provides the criminal justice, medical, mental health, legal, and social service agencies to develop programs and treatment interventions for the female offenders upon release. Encouraging this relationship among between mothers and their children would also entail creating gender specific programs which would provide services that increase a women's ability to support her children following her release therefore reducing recidivism. Statistics show that the majority of female offenders are poor, with few job skills and little education. Without attention to the improvement of women's capacity to support themselves, improve connections between mothers and their children then their subsequent to return to prison is evident.

Therefore, this study and analyzes of the new TRAS is important to see if its gender specific assessment is meeting its goal of lowering recidivism rates in Texas.

Relationships in Prison

Lastly, relationships formed while in prison also influence the ways that female offenders live and relate to others while in prison. There is a clear gender difference in the relationships female and male prisoners develop and maintain while incarcerated.

Women spend their time while incarcerated differently than men. Men concentrate on primarily surviving. They do not form sustained relationships. They most often rely on strength, violence, and their ability to withstand outside pressures to get themselves through their time in prison. Women, however try to stay involved in the lives of significant others, primarily their children, and their own families, who usually take on the role of caring for their children. Most often, female offenders take on a caregiving role even while incarcerated (Sawyer, 2018). Within prison, female relationships occur in three ways: relationships with children and family in the community, relationships with other women prisoners, and relationships with staff (Sawyer, 2018). In 2015, an American Correctional Association (ACA) survey asked female offenders to name "the most important person in your life right now." The ACA (2015) reported that 52 percent of the women interviewed responded that their child (or children) was most important to them. Another 18 percent identified their mothers as most important to them. Just over 10 percent replied that a husband or significant other held this status (p. 54). It is important for correctional staff to understand female offenders' relationships while incarcerated. Most often female offenders form a few different types of personal

relationships while in prison. Some female offenders develop a very real romantic relationship, while most often correctional staff notice that female offenders form a family type of arrangement while incarcerated (Sawyer, 2018).

Risk Assessment in Other States

Many new sentencing policies were enacted to control crime during the 1980s (Sawyer, 2018). These policies have resulted in overcrowded prisons, high financial costs, and extreme racial disparities. Research conducted on many rehabilitative and treatment programs proved they were ineffective. Recidivism rates continued to remain high. Officials in the correctional field wondered if an assessment tool could create a seamless approach to supervising offenders from their entry into the criminal justice system beginning with pre-trial interventions until their release on parole (Sawyer, 2018). Therefore, several approaches were evaluated because for example evidence-based research shows everything that pertains to supervising offenders (from monitoring to referrals, to programming, to supporting positive behavior change) begins with an accurate assessment. The field of community supervision was constantly evolving as everyone learns more about what works in assisting offenders' successfully complete probation or parole. In order to reduce recidivism rate, we must develop accurate assessments to learn/ we must also learn how to help change the offender's behavior for life to reduce his/her likelihood of recidivism. Over the last 30 years, many researchers in the Criminal Justice field in Texas have studied ways to keep offenders from reoffending. Studies have included different types of 'boot camps' to all kinds of therapy (pets, art, etc....). Recorded data has shown that no one response or requirement has

worked in lowering recidivism. Research has indicated that all systems within the Criminal Justice arena must work cohesively and comprehensively incorporating the principles of research –based practices in order to lower recidivism. Evidence-based practices refers to new interventions and approaches in the assessment of offenders through a risk/need’s assessment tool. This tool, in turn, helped to identify the offender’s needs, motivations, or factors that contribute to the offender’s reoffending. Most importantly, evidence-based practices helped to reform policy and sentencing which helped “judges prioritize who to detain, who to supervise, and who is in need of treatment or services.” (Warren, pg. 15) This tool helped to transition low risk offenders out of the system quickly and using fewer resources. This tool consists of 3 components and case management driven. It can be modified to fit different offender populations both male and female. Correctly identifying needs area are key to successful re-integration of all offenders.

Research indicates that risk varies between the offender populations. First, the risk assessment tools are used as a means of predicating future behavior and the likelihood of recidivism. Note, this does not mean an offender who scores as a high risk will commit a new offense but chances are higher, they will re-offend. The risk/need is an actuarial assessment which means it is based on research. All this means is that every item on the assessment is predictive of risk. Need is the second component. This identifies the offender’s specific criminogenic needs. Criminogenic needs are considered dynamic risk factors and shows exactly where the correctional interventions are needed. Dynamic factors can be changed. This tells the assessor where to concentrate on helping

the offender. Finally, the responsivity component tells the assessor what barriers the offender needs to overcome to stop reoffending.

Prison populations have shown a significant increase over the past several decades. Female offenders, while still the minority as compared to men, have shown the largest increase in numbers in both incarceration and recidivism (Sawyer, 2018). While many male offenders are married or have female significant others to care for their children, female offenders are usually single heads of household and have custody of minor children (Sawyer, 2018). Some have suggested that these children are adversely impacted by their mother's incarceration and more likely to repeat the cycle of criminality (Sawyer, 2018). The recidivism of female inmates affects not only the offender herself but often her children and their family members (Sawyer, 2018). Predicting who will return to prison is essential in order to provide pre- and post-release interventions and support and help break the cycle of criminality. Accomplishing this is difficult as there is no unifying theory of criminality for female offenders from which to draw and those available have been developed primarily by studies on males. (Conlin, 2017). The actuarial instruments currently used to determine the odds of returning to prison have been largely developed from data of male offenders (Wolf, 2017). While they have been shown to have fairly reliable predictive validity with male inmates, many have questioned their applicability to women (Wolfe, 2017).

Much of the literature review shows how today's overcrowded prisons are a direct result of the sentencing policies of the 1980's. Sentencing guidelines (such as the three strikes laws) led to the over incarceration of low-level nonviolent offender. Articles

written by authors Makarios, Miller, and Garland discuss evidence-based practices currently being assessed in many states on male offenders. Current data shows evidence-based practices are being used in several states. In New Mexico, evidence-based practices and programs have been introduced and preliminary findings have been positive. Other states have also successfully started using evidence-based practices resulting in significant cost savings. Oregon, Michigan, Texas and Washington have started using the new assessment tool. In Texas, current validated data shows that using the risk/needs assessment tool along with treatment programs has seen a reduction in incarceration rates, the closing of a 1,100-bed prison, along with a million dollars in savings. Oregon saw the best results in their prison population reduction and recidivism rate. (Makarios and Latessa, 2013). Their success rate is a result of inmates receiving their risk/needs assessment tool at intake, continued individual treatment, and good management upon reentry into society. Michigan also implemented a valid assessment tool along with policy changes which reduced revocations and lowered their recidivism rates (Makarios and Latessa, 2013) An added benefit of using EBP in Michigan was the closing of prisons at a huge cost savings (Makarios and Latessa, 2013). During the 2007 legislature, the state of Washington invested in evidence-based practices and now has an incarceration rate lower than the National average along with an estimated savings of 1.3 billion. It has also managed to close both an adult and juvenile facilities. In, Johnson County, Kansas, EBP was used to develop pretrial risk assessment, release, and detention guidelines. This a risk score was used to help pretrial officers make recommendations whether to detain or release an offender depending on their assessed risk level (Makarios

and Latessa, 2013). Most of the data shows that the jail population is made up of low-level offenses, comprised of offenders who cannot make bail, who are mentally ill, or are repeat offenders with some substance abuse addiction, and possibly homeless.

Females, more often than males, are victims of multiple types of abuse, rather than just one (DeHart & Moran, 2015). In a 2012 study, Lynch et al. found that out of 102 incarcerated women, 23.5% experienced four types of victimization (forced intercourse, forced molestation, physical violence with a weapon, and physical violence without a weapon) at some point in their past. 32% experienced three of these types of victimization, and 25.5% experienced two types. Only 10.8% reported that they had never been victimized in any way. Once victimized, women were at risk for further abuse. In the same study, 90% of women reported that they had experienced violence at the hands of a romantic partner within the year preceding incarceration. Victimization often precedes substance abuse, and mental health issues (Tripodi & Pettus-Davis, 2012).

Risk Factors for Reoffending

There is an abundance of research on risk assessment of incarcerated females and recidivism. However, most studies aimed at exploring risk factors for reoffending are done using male subjects (Barrick et al., 2014; Olson et al., 2016). Females are especially absent from literature involving post-release studies (Barrick, et al, 2014, Olson et al., 2016). Olson et al. (2016) used feminist theory as a means to quantitatively explore the differences between males and females as to determine what risk factors contributed to their recidivism. Findings revealed that prior self-harm, childhood physical abuse, and previous mental health treatment had no correlation to recidivism. In

light of this finding, Olson et al. (2016) suggests that these factors may be more associated with how each individual participate was initiated into criminal activity rather than with recidivism. However, it should also be mentioned that these results could also be the result of poor self-reporting of these experiences by participants, or of different rates of exposure to various types of treatment. This study did reveal that being unmarried increased the risk of recidivism for men, but not for women. Having prior arrests for the sale of drugs was predictive of violent offending for women, but not for men. Olson et al. (2016) also found that having a prior prostitution charge put women at increased risk for recidivism, which is discussed more in depth toward the end of this section. This study also supported well-known correlations between both high rates of prior offenses, and age, with recidivism for both genders. Overall, the authors of this study highlighted the need to provide risk assessment paying specific to gender-specific factors when performing intakes, or risk assessment with offenders. A quantitative study by Scott et al. (2014) looked for predictors of recidivism for women over a 3-year period after release. This study revealed that recidivism could be reliably predicted for women by looking at these four factors (age, not having custody of children, the frequency of substance abuse, and number of substances abused). The correlation between substance abuse and criminal behavior is well documented (Wikoff, Linhorst, & Morani, 2012), but when the frequency and variety of substance use increases, risk of recidivism also increases (Scott et al., 2014). Age is a predictor of recidivism risk for both men and women. As age increases, criminal behavior decreases (Scott et al., 2014). In this study, women who had no custody of their children had a 50% higher risk of recidivating within

3 years after release. In fact, women without custody of their children had more than four times the risk of recidivating within the first 90 days than women without children. In addition to these robust findings, Scott et al. (2014) acknowledges other risk factors that were found to be significant, such as prostitution (gender responsive factor) and criminogenic thinking (gender-neutral factor). The Scott et al. (2014) study culminates by stressing the need to address both gender responsive, and gender-neutral risk factors in assessing and treating offenders. Olson et al. (2016) acknowledges that during intake, quality of familial and marital relationships is typically not explored. Only marital status is noted. However, further exploration of this factor may allow corrections professionals to ascertain whether or not an inmate has prosocial friends, family members, or partners to return to. Noting the type and amount of contact an offender has with others on the outside is also valuable in understanding recidivism risk.

Social ties and familial relationships can help to predict recidivism more for women than for men (Barrick et al, 2014). Barrick et al., (2014) quantitatively examined the impact of social ties on incarcerated women. Although there is limited research aimed at determining the importance of pre- post-release emotional support, the existing literature shows that positive familial support and contact aids reintegration. Barrick et al (2014) study consisted of 255 women, where nearly three quarters of whom had minor children. They looked at various types of contact these included contacts by mail, phone, and by visitation. Their results showed that offenders with more familial contact while incarcerated had better post-release outcomes than offenders with less contact. Results also indicated that women with children were less likely to recidivate than those without

children. The most interesting finding was that woman with lower rates of familial contact, but higher rates of non-familial contact had higher risk of recidivating after release than those with higher rates of familial contact, but lower rates of non-familial contact. They infer that woman with more familial contact have more stable familial relationships, and therefore, more instrumental support upon release, thus contributing to their success upon reentry. Just as there is a well-documented correlation between substance abuse and crime, as well as age and crime, there is also a significant correlation between low levels of education and crime (Olson, 2016). Lack of education limits earning potential. Olson et al. (2016) notes the importance of acknowledging context when considering the factors that bring a woman in contact with the justice system, and Scott et al. (2014) notes the connection between trauma (although not a risk factor in itself), and the subsequent behaviors that can lead to interaction with the justice system (i.e., substance abuse or risky sexual behavior). Scott et al. (2014) points out that victimization serves to increase stress and mental health problems, which then may be coped with by abusing substances, which then increases the likelihood of involvement with the justice system. These quantitative studies allude to the intersectionality of various facets of life as they apply to recidivism risk, but a qualitative approach may more fully demonstrate the entwinement of these factors.

Evidence-Based Practices

The goal of community supervision (adult probation/parole) is to protect the community while supervising and rehabilitating offenders. Recent research indicates the best way to meet this goal is to embrace evidence-based practices (EBP; TDCJ, 2015).

EBP begins with a valid, reliable risk and needs assessment that identifies those offenders who are most likely to commit new crimes, causing more harm to society and who need the most intensive supervision, and lastly the most important aspect is providing a supervision plan which will help the offender and the supervising officer identify each offender's criminogenic needs that cause his/her reoffending. This process was mandated for all 122 Community Supervision and Corrections Departments (CSCDs) and all of Parole by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Community Justice Assistance Division (TDCJ-CJAD) Standard 163.35(c).2 to accommodate this new mandate TDCJ went about searching for how best to implement this new standard.

Search for New Assessments

Prior to 2015 risk assessments in Texas for both male and female offenders, Parole and Correctional Officers used the Wisconsin Tool to assess risk. This was the risk assessment instrument or better known as a salient factor score sheet which was supposed to determine risk the same on both male and female offenders up until 2015 by TDCJ. It was a simple 7-point score sheet used to assess past criminal behavior, education, marital status, current offense, drug or alcohol usage on a range of 1 to 5 the higher the score the higher the supervision level assessed on; the offender. Gender was not a factor used to determine risk. This was a modified version of the risk assessment developed in Wisconsin in the late 1970s, however, in 2006, due to a department study conducted by both Community Supervision and Parole agencies it was found that this tool had several serious issues relating to its reliability and validity in determining risk levels. Although, TDCJ- Parole together with CJAD had already been searching for

types of gender specific assessment alternatives in order to locate another risk assessment with greater risk predictive accuracy, and therefore provide more guidance to the Supervision/ Correctional Officer (CSO/PO's) in addressing the level of risk and criminogenic needs of offenders (TDCJ, 2015).

One of the first types of assessment investigated and tested within the Texas correctional system was known as the Level of Supervision Inventory–Revised (LSI-R) (Trotter, 2013). The LSI-R, is an actuarial risk-assessment tool based on social learning theory, it is also thought of as being “gender neutral” by its creators; as such, supporters claim it is appropriate for all correctional populations (Trotter, 2013). Many Feminist criminologists have long pointed out the lack of attention to gender in social learning theory (Lewis, 2017). Therefore because it failed to account for the gendered context of female crime and relies too heavy on social learning variables (e.g., deviant peer associations), the LSI-R turned out to overclassify a large percentage of women, resulting in increased risk levels and supervision it also lacked gender-responsive treatment (Trotter, 2013) conducted a study using data from personal interviews, PSIs, officer logs, and other official records for 235 women under community corrections supervision in Minnesota and Oregon. They sought to validate Daly’s work and use his gender pathways as a means to evaluate LSI-R assessment subsequently they used the information gathered to classify women according to Daly’s five pathways and identified meaningful subgroups of women who followed each of the five pathways these included (street, drug connected, harmed and harming, battered) and non-gendered pathways (economically motivated) and evaluated the performance of the LSI-R across each female subgroup

(Trotter, 2013). In their study, the LSI-R accurately predicted recidivism risk for economically motivated women yet failed and misclassified a significant proportion of women following the gendered pathways to crime (Trotter, 2013). This research, and subsequent evaluations of the LSI-R, calls the alleged gender neutrality of social learning theory into question (Sawyer, 2018). Another recent pathways-informed study of women parolees demonstrated similar findings in that drug-involved former prisoners had higher rates of recidivism (Ferguson, 2017). Feminist legal theorist addressed these concerns by creating gender-responsive supplements to traditional actuarial risk assessments (Van Voorhis, 2012). Scholars have also begun to test their own female –inspired models into diverse samples. Some of these models include Brennan et al.’s (2012) female pathways, the childhood victimization model, relational model, and social and human capital model (Van Voorhis, 2012). Specifically, Brennan et al.’s (2012) “person-centered approach” incorporated diverse sources of information in their pathways analysis of 718 women drawn from two California prisons. For these participants, a criminal history was derived from official records and the Women’s Risk/Needs Assessment (WRNA) and Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS) assessment were administered to compile a comprehensive history of the offenders. Some of the assessment components included victimization and abuse, mental health, and housing (Brennan et al., 2012). Using hierarchical cluster analysis, Brennan and colleagues identified four pathways that varied in terms of life histories, risks, and needs. Each of the four pathways included two distinct groups or sub-pathways. Age is the primary factor that determined pathway variation. Two of the pathways in Brennan et

al.'s (2012) study reflected relatively normal functioning but drug abusing routes to incarceration.

In order to establish testing of the LSI-R assessment several counties were granted the monies and waiver to see the efficacy of this assessment, these counties were Potter, Dallas, and Harris. The purpose of the waivers was to research the results, i.e., prediction accuracy of the LSI-R vs. the Wisconsin tool (TDCJ, 2015). A preliminary validation study, dated back on July 27, 2007, was released by CJAD Research and Evaluation (2008), these findings were based on a relatively small sample of offenders in Potter and Harris Counties. According to the study, it found that additional analysis was still needed in order to produce a meaningful comparative report. Therefore, due to the relatively small study and invalidated results the LSI-5 assessment was not considered to replace the Wisconsin tool at the time.

Validation for Evidence-Based Practices

Simultaneously, TDCJ-CJAD was examining the possibility of developing a risk assessment instrument from data available in the Community Supervision Tracking System (CSTS) and arrest data from the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) (TDCJ, 2015). This subsequently led to the development of a new, Static-items-only Texas Risk Assessment STRONG. It should be noted that TDCJ was looking for a better assessment than LSI-R due to a similar validation study completed by the Washington State Department of Corrections (WA DOC) in two stages – in 2003 and 2007. This study conducted by WA-DOC found in the first study, after using the LSI-R for more than a decade, the need for something more predictive and objective of risk which also

allowed for increased inter-rater reliability (TDCJ, 2015). The Washington Correctional Department also wanted a better assessment which would lower female offender population which in turn lessen court cases defending the overpopulated correctional system. (TDCJ, 2015). This study helped the WA-DOC to create and implement a new assessment tool, which is currently in use in the statewide WA DOC system – known as the STRONG, for which stands for the Static Risk and Offender Needs Guide (TDCJ, 2015). This is a Static Risk Assessment involves a 26-item tool constructed from the factors most strongly associated with recidivism subsequently organized into the following six categories: demographics, juvenile record, commitments to DOC, adult felony record, adult misdemeanor record, and adult sentence violations (TDCJ,2015).

The Static Risk Assessment was validated by Washington back on March 2007 and, like the newly instituted TRAS, was found to have greater risk predictive accuracy than the LSI-R.

Foundation for Texas Risk Assessment

Since 2006, the Texas State Legislature had been searching for a better predictive assessment for female recidivism and were providing significant funding to implement evidence-based diversion programs to 48 Community Service Correctional Department with in the entire state (TDCJ, 2015). These 48 CSCDs account for 78% of the felons on community supervision (probation) in Texas (TDCJ, 2015). By the end of 2008, the 79th and 80th Texas legislation received positive notification and feedback from the CJAD showing positive results due to the implementation of EBP and requesting that further investment was needed. These findings from EBP are as follows: As the felony probation

population had risen by 3.1% since FY 2005, to a total of 170,779 in FY 2008, felony revocations to TDCJ have decreased 0.4% (TDCJ, 2015). The report also found that at both CSCD and TDCJ at reentry, reintegration departments which received additional diversion funding had fewer felony revocations in FY 2008 than in FY 2005, while revocations for departments not receiving any additional diversion funding increased (TDCJ, 2016). The study also found that one added component of the diversion program was the early discharge in progressive sanctions models they provided incentives for probationers to be successful and to decrease caseload sizes (TDCJ, 2015). Because of the positive findings, CSCDs receiving additional funding in FY 2006-2007 and FY 2008-2009 to continue with EBP practices and this increased early discharges 45% from FY 2005 to FY 2008, while departments that received no additional funding increased early discharges 35% (TDCJ,2015). As noted earlier in the paper, this is validating the same study being conducted in the state of Washington receiving positive results implementing the STRONG. WA DOC adopted a new policy to offer to offenders who score Low or Moderate on the Static Risk Assessment, the opportunity to earn a 50% reduction in supervision time served, i.e., early discharge (TDCJ,2015). This is a great example of how Texas CSCDs could better use an improved risk assessment process to reduce caseloads and increase management efficacy (TDCJ, 2015). This was an incentive for CSCD to validate the new assessment tool here in Texas (TDCJ, 2015).

Per the findings to the legislation, these EBP were designed to reduce recidivism, and to provide alternatives to incarceration, and they are providing positive results. As a result, many CSCDs asked and received additional funding to build a better skill set for

probation officers that encompasses access to a wide range of proven assessments, supervision plans that target an offender's criminogenic needs, and provided in an efficient seamless single-repository management information system.

Implementing Best Practices

TDCJ addressed the need to incorporate the findings from CSCD easily once leadership committed to sustaining a firm adherence to evidence-based practices: they found/implemented EBP. EBP is a true needs assessment to better evaluate an offender's dynamic risk factors (criminogenic needs), as well as his/her protective factors and responsivity issues. The TRAS (Static Risk Offender Needs Guide) STRONG includes such a tool – known as the Offender Needs Guide, and provides an easy-to-use system that also uses those assessment results to create and guide the supervision plan all the way to re-entry. It also enhanced staff job satisfaction through increased training in Motivational Interviewing (MI) – a technique and set of skills that has been proven to increase staff (as well as offender) efficacies. EBP also help to improve protocols policies and practices (new business rules) to improve planning and delivery of integrated service for clients, along a continuum of care after release from prison. Another benefit to instituting EBP is in data management, especially regarding the various tools/instruments and reports currently being used in the CSCDs.

The majority of offenders on adult probation in Texas successfully complete their sentences (TDCJ, 2015). The biggest challenge for both the Probation and Parole Systems is to reduce the number of offenders who do recidivate. Implementing EBP, as outlined in these preliminary findings would help achieve this goal. This goal will

become even more imperative as the current economic situation worsens and the caseload for both Probation and Parole undoubtedly increases. This was the final validation study for EBP which was subsequently implemented within all the agencies under the supervision of TDCJ.

Texas Risk Assessment System

In January of 2015, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice completed the agency-wide implementation of a new risk assessment tool designed to help community supervision, prison, reentry and aftercare professionals create custom case management programs for all offenders. The Texas Risk Assessment System or TRAS interprets an offender's criminal history along with their criminogenic needs, allowing criminal justice officials to devise the most efficient case plans possible, enabling the agency to carefully allocate supervision resources and, in turn, reduce offender recidivism rates and increase public safety (TDCJ, 2015). After ten years of searching for an alternative to the Wisconsin tool and studying other various risk assessment tools the leadership of TDCJ and CJAD finally agreed to the implementation of TRAS (TDCJ, 2015).

Search for a New Assessment Tool in Texas

The search for a new assessment began in 2006, when a committee was created, under the direction of co-chairs Carey Welebob of CJAD and Dr. Teresa May, then of the Dallas County Community Supervision and Corrections Department (TDCJ, 2015). The committee reviewed and studied several types of assessment tools and although several were considered, many other types of assessment were dismissed due to the major changes that would have to be made in order to adapt them for use due to the diverse

Texas offender population (TDCJ, 2015). Finally, in 2008, Welebob attended a conference where Dr. Ed Latessa of the University of Cincinnati spoke about a new assessment instrument known as the Ohio Risk Assessment System (TDCJ, 2015). This assessment had most of the criteria sought by the Texas committee, but Ohio had only tested the instrument on thirteen hundred offender volunteers (TDCJ, 2015). The committee recommended a statewide validation of the instrument at various CSCDs (Probation) to determine how the assessment tool could be made viable in Texas. This validation study began in late 2010 and eventually tested nearly seven thousand felony and misdemeanor probation offenders in and around the Dallas area (TDCJ, 2015).

While the assessment tool was being validated by probation, TDCJ was also considering the benefits of a system-wide assessment instrument which would help stream low risk offenders away from entering the criminal justice system. Since probation was moving toward implementation of the TRAS tool, that assessment instrument was naturally the focal point of this discussion among all the correctional agencies. The capabilities TRAS offered better case management which made the instrument equally useful for parole supervision, and the related incarceration and reentry components made TRAS also a logical choice for adoption throughout TDCJ (TDCJ, 2015). It wasn't long after the Parole had decided on the TRAS instrument that the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission recommended the agency implement "a system-wide risk and needs assessment for use in managing offenders on probation, parole and in prison" (TDCJ, 2015, pg.1) Subsequent to the Sunset recommendation, Senate Bill 213 by

Senator John Whitmire was enacted which required the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to implement a standardized instrument by 2015 (TDCJ, 2015).

TRAS Identifiers

The TRAS is divided into felony and misdemeanor sections, including a series of questions about the offender's education, family, job history, social support and substance abuse, along with a new section on criminogenic categories such as criminal attitudes and behavioral patterns (TDCJ, 2015). Prior to administering the assessment, probation and parole officers examine an offender's criminal history as well as collateral sources of information, such as family members, to corroborate the offender's answers prior to implementing and devising a supervision plan.

TRAS first identifies low-risk offenders using a "screener" which is a smaller set of questions before conducting a full assessment. This first step in the process is essential in order to screen out the low-risk individuals, and help them to reintegrate back into society and to separate them from the higher risk offender. During the instrument's validation process, it was found that among offenders deemed low-risk and tracked for more than a year, only one in ten reoffended and or committed a technical violation which would result in them being return to prison (TDCJ, 2015). This would enable local often overburden resources to be used on the other nine individuals instead all ten. Low scorers are placed on a low-risk caseload and are monitored, but not over-supervised or put into programs that they would mingle with higher risk offenders who then may lead them to recidivate.

The next step is to conduct the full assessment for those who did not screen out as low-risk (TDCJ, 2015). The full assessment tells the parole officers which risks the offender is likely to face and how to change behaviors and target resources to best meet the needs of the individual. TRAS will allow the officer to answer questions in reference to social support and involvement with criminal activity. At this point, the tool becomes more of a risk management/risk reduction plan instead of a risk assessment, and moves onto the last step: recommendations on how to supervise, address needs, reduce risk and get the offender back on track (TDCJ, 2015).

Further and most importantly it helps streamline the process if for some reason the offender reoffends while on parole and returns to prison, the assessment history follows that person through the criminal justice system, and is reassessed as needed.

In prison, the assessment plays a role in the prioritization of offender programming through the offender's Individualized Treatment Plan. TRAS also has a reentry supplemental tool designed to help receiving parole officers and reentry case managers' plans for the person's community needs. "I think it's an essential tool," said April Zamora, Director of TDCJ's Reentry and Integration Division (TDCJ, 2015). The whole purpose and benefits of having one assessment tool is so Offender Information Management System all criminal justice professionals who have access to the system and contact with the offender are aware of all the risks that offender places while on supervision and to help the subsequent supervising officer become aware of the resources that are needed and most importantly knows what critical areas still need to be addressed and worked on.

TRAS most importantly finally establishes the distinct needs and risk and separate cutoff scores for both male and female offenders, matching supervision style, well-researched interventions, treatments, services, programs and resources to the individual, as opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach. This new and innovative assessment tool allows TDCJ to fulfill its mission to successfully reintegrate offenders into society by using the best case plans possible to efficiently allocate agency and community resources on those high-risk offenders who need more interventions (TDCJ, 2015). It also allows officers to seek resources on those offenders who would best benefit from them. It would also impact public safety, with resources spent on the offenders who need them most, not those who need them least. TDCJ increased their budget in order to help retrain staff both inside and outside the prison on TRAS being implemented. It was far less expensive and practical to increase the budget than to build more prisons. Keeping one offender out under supervision whether on probation or parole costs the taxpayers an average \$2.13 a day in comparison to \$44 a day in prison.

Importance of TRAS

During the 1990's, Texas spent about \$2.3 billion to build new prisons, and increase the capacity from 50,000 to 154,000 beds (TDCJ, 2015, p. 1). Statistics show that between 1985 and 2005, the Texas prison population together with both male and female jumped 300 percent. A study conducted by PEW Center in February of 2008 pointed out that prison costs were a strain on the state budgets and not reducing recidivism rates. Statically making Texas with its current prison and jail population of 152,661, the nation's leader in imprisonment rates (TDCJ, 2016, p. 2). The budget for

TDCJ to manage that population was around the range of is \$4.5 billion, which was 79 percent of the total state's department budget (TDCJ, 2015, p. 2).

Since Probation implemented the new assessment, its total felony and misdemeanor probationers, under community supervision, decreased over the past decade to 431,494, and with adding more funding for diversion programs proved positive effects on reducing probation and technical revocations (CJAD, 2015). In short, Texas Community Supervision, which is managing roughly three times the number of offenders as are incarcerated, is proving to be a cost-effective alternative (CJAD, 2015).

Clearly, there is a great need in Texas to reduce the rate of adult incarceration. This can be accomplished – without diminishing public safety – and has been proven by Community Supervision's ongoing reductions in felony probation revocations and technical revocations (CJAD, 2015). To gain even better results, TDCJ/CJAD and the individual CSCDs should move forward, towards a more complete implementation of Evidence-Based Practices thus the implementation of TRAS statewide was initiated in 2015. The biggest outcome to implementing TRAS was that both community leaders and the officials at the Texas State Division of Corrections have come to understand that once female offenders have served their sentences, the importance of a smoother transition successfully back into society as law-abiding citizens is in the interest of public safety and lower recidivism rates (TDCJ, 2015).

This new assessment and reassessment of the female offender's needs are considered the first step in delivery of services. Understanding the individual and comprehensive needs of female offenders was an essential step in developing and

implementing programs that produce better outcomes for women after their release into the community (Conlin, 2017).

This literature review shows the many benefits of implementing the new risk assessment tool known as TRAS, throughout the Texas Department of Corrections and its' agencies'. It has demonstrated the importance of developing local community support agencies for female ex-offenders such as the Re-entry Partnership. This type of program, will help to bridge the gap by providing female offenders with the chance and hope of a new beginning and not recidivating and returning to prison. Research shows that reentry programs seek to reduce recidivism rates and enhance public safety, help to alleviate many fiscal pressures associated with ex-offenders being returned to prison, and provide opportunities for ex-offenders to straighten out their lives. Many researchers have found that most often when women leave prison, they are not any better prepared to address the problems which led to their involvement in illegal activities and their emotional, family economical situations are often worse than they were prior to incarceration. Another important point to be made other than the importance of having gender specific assessment is that research shows community support agencies must provide adequate resources to help female ex-offenders transition back into the society successfully (Sawyer, 2018). The Texas Retry Partnership is a group of local service providers that work in association with the Texas Department of Corrections to provide a smoother transition for female ex-offenders attempting to reintegrate back into society.

Community support programs such as the Re-entry Partnership must effectively help female ex-offenders prepare for, find, and retain adequate employment when they

are released into local communities. Likewise, new data and research support shows that agencies also need to provide assistance to female offenders who have existing issues with issues such as family reunification, housing, substance abuse, and mental illness issues. This paper and quantitative study begins to fill in the gap found in the literature by providing updated information about the recent risk assessment implemented by TDCJ and what female ex-offenders feel are the specific needs that should be addressed to successful reintegrate into society. This critical and quantitative study can help the TDCJ and local community agencies work together and build upon existing transitional and reintegration strategies. The data can help ensure that female ex-offenders will have a successful chance at becoming law-abiding citizens once they are released and reintegrate into society.

Summary

During the last 20-years, there has been a profound change in the manner in which women are treated within the criminal justice system. This has been a result of more expansive law enforcement efforts, stiffer drug sentencing laws, and post-conviction barriers to reentry that uniquely affect women. In response, the consideration of a gender-specific assessment approach instituted by Texas has moved from a mere footnote to a full-fledged reform movement. The methodology of the study presented in chapter 3 and a more detailed description of the technical aspects of the TRAS will be included. Detailed description of the population, the sample, research design, and statistical analyses will also be included. The results of the study, a review of the findings, and further exploration of the study's hypothesis were provided in chapter 4. A

discussion of the study's findings, an interpretation of the findings, implications for social change, and recommendations for further action and study were included in chapter 5.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The rapidly growing rate of women's incarceration calls for a critical evaluation of the social impact of the nation's increasing reliance on correctional facilities to deal with women's involvement in crime. Increasing arrests for property and public order offenses are partly responsible for women's incarceration rate outpacing that of men. The "war on drugs," however, has been most influential in the nationwide expansion of the prison population, having a particularly devastating impact on women over the past 25 years. Women are now more likely than men to serve time for drug offenses and are subject to increasingly punitive law enforcement and sentencing practices despite that they are less likely than men to play a central role in the drug trade. Additionally, women's higher proportion of incarceration for property crimes than men reflects the extreme economic disadvantages that many women face prior to incarceration. There is an increasing need for further consideration of the nature of women's involvement in crime in order to respond appropriately to the personal and structural causes of their criminal behavior rather than relying solely on punitive responses. This chapter includes a description of the design, sample, instrumentation, data analysis, and ethical considerations involved in this study. An overview of the design of the study includes a rationale for why this particular research design was selected. Characteristics of the sample and sample size as well as a description of the instrumentation are included. Finally, the data collection process and analysis are discussed.

Research Design

The research was a quantitative study to determine the effect of the new risk assessment tool known as TRAS on recidivism rates for female offenders in the state of Texas from those of the old assessment tool used on female offenders. The secondary data are housed in an electronic database maintained by the TDCJ Parole Division Agency in Austin, Texas with data from 2014, 2015, and 2018 made available to me after the necessary committee, school, and institutional review board (IRB) approval (03/04/2021: 10-13-20-0526115) was secured. As stated, secondary archival data were used in this quasi-experimental quantitative study to determine if newly assigned supervision levels reduced recidivism through the use of the new assessment tool being implemented in 2015 known as TRAS on the post incarcerated female population from recidivism rates from the prior year 2014 that used the old assessment tool.

Predicted recidivism is within 3 years post release (Sawyer, 2018). This design was chosen as a true experimental design and is not often possible in prison settings. The participants for the study were recidivating female offenders during the years of 2014, 2015, and 2018 who were assessed by two different risk assessments by their supervising parole officers upon being release from a Texas prison. Two studies were conducted, one using 2014 data and using 2015 data. Then the data from 2015 were analyzed because those female offenders upon release from incarceration were assessed for the first time using the new risk assessment tool. The data from 2018, 3 years after TRAS implementation, were analyzed to ascertain if the new risk assessment was correctly identifying risk, thereby lowering recidivism rates. The use of archival data allowed the

inclusion of adequate data set results necessary to establish statistical significance. Analyses using a chi-square statistical pre- and post-test were used to conduct measures of the differences in recidivism rates from 2014 and 2018. All assessed data were obtained with the permission from the Texas Department of Corrections who gathered the statistical data on a yearly basis for their statistical yearly report published on their public website.

Quantitative Research

Quantitative research is rooted in the philosophy of positivism. Positivism dates as far back as the 19th century (Maxfield & Babbie, 2018). Stemming from the physical sciences and a philosophical point of view, this method uses deductive reasoning. Scientifically, quantitative research is objective and is useful for drawing a general conclusion or result (Maxfield & Babbie, 2018). Most of what people know comes from intuition or perception. The way people experience the world may be determined by them as well as the world in which they live (Maxfield & Babbie, 2018). Data collection in this methodology includes forming a hypothesis, testing theories, questionnaire administration, conducting experiments, administering surveys, and analyzing data (Rugg, 2007). There were two hypotheses in this study. The literature review identified several quantitative studies to explain relationships between barriers that impact recidivism and provide a foundation for using a quantitative methodology. This was demonstrated by the dependent variable of recidivism, which was measured as re-arrest and returned to prison due to a technical violation or reoffending by supervision level. The alpha level for the study was the probability of rejecting the null hypothesis,

assuming that the hypothesis was true. For this study, an alpha level of $p < .05$ was used. This alpha value is most often and commonly used in social science research (Rugg, 2007).

Quasi-Experimental Design

The goal of quasi-experimental research is to examine whether a change occurs within the intended group, which in this study consisted of the female offender post incarceration and their rate of recidivism based on the new assessment tool risk score. Many quasi-experiment studies include different methods of collection, including random assignments, a control group, and a treatment group within pre- and post-test design. Accordingly, I used a pre- and post-test analysis of assessment to determine if there was a relationship between the old/new risk assessment and the rate of recidivism.

Recidivism was represented by the women's assessed supervision level at the time of re-arrest due to reoffending or committing a rule violation. A quasi-experimental design was the most appropriate design for the current study as it allowed me to analyze data from pre- and post-assessment tools that identified risk in post incarcerated female offenders. I identified the independent variables risk from the year 2014 and the new 2015 assessment tools. A second study was conducted using the first year of implementation of TRAS in 2015 from 2018, 3 years after.

To analyze the data, a chi-squared statistical test was conducted in this study. The chi-square test is a statistical procedure used by researchers to examine the differences between categorical variables in the same population. For this study, the sample population was female post incarcerated offenders (see Rugg, 2007). This chi-square test

informed me whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the dependent variable of recidivism determined by supervision level and the independent variable of risk determined by the assessment in order to answer the research questions (see Rugg, 2007). A chi-square test measures how likely it is that the observed data reflect that relationship between the two variables (Rugg, 2007). This test measures if there is a statistically significance correlation found among the two variables being tested to answer the research questions (Rugg, 2007). The chi-square statistical analysis allowed me to compare if there was a statistically significant lower rate of female offender recidivism rates assessed correctly within the first year or 3 years after its implementation. In this study, the independent variable tested was risk, in the form of both the old and new assessment tools, and the dependent variable was recidivism, determined by supervision level.

Secondary Data Analysis

This research involved the collection of existing secondary data and records that were publicly available. Using informed secondary data involved the use of existing data that were collected for the purposes of a prior statistical report. In this study, the data were collected by the TDCJ for their yearly statistical report and made available to the public on their website. This yearly statistical report lists data of both male and female offenders being sent to prison, being released from custody, and returning offenders by region. Texas is broken down into five regions, and each region reports their data to TDCJ on a monthly basis. This information was compiled into a yearly statistical report.

For this study, I used the yearly statistical report from 2014, 2015, and 2018 found on the TDCJ website along with the requested data of female offenders who reoffended and were returned to the TDCJ correctional system. The data of reoffending female offenders was provided by the TDCJ Parole Public Information Office. It was my understanding that every month a parole officer submits a report of each individual currently under their supervision by gender and supervision status (risk) and includes offenders who violated probation and were returned to prison for either a technical or new offense violation. For this study, the population (N) was the total number of female offenders who recidivated in the years of 2014, 2015, and 2018. The total number of recidivating females varied from years 2014, 2015, and 2018. In the present study, I aimed to assess each research question on the effectiveness of the old and new assessment tools identifying female offender risk and recidivism (supervision level) rates in Texas.

There were several advantages to the use of secondary data. First, from a practical perspective, this method was time efficient. For example, because most of the data set can be downloaded directly from the TDCJ website, and the option existed to analyze data online, I was able to start analyzing and interpreting results sooner. Second, this method was cost effective, merely by removing the costs associated with conducting individual sampling research. From a research perspective, by accessing a publicly available dataset, I was able to access a valid and reliable data set collected by the TDCJ. The data could not otherwise have been collected, as it would have been too time consuming. This study would have been impossible without the use and availability of

the TDCJ secondary dataset. Lastly, from an ethical perspective, I did not have any contact with participants, which removed bias or other concerns normally associated with human subject research.

Variables

In this study, the data/variables were collected by the TDCJ for their yearly statistical report and were made available to the public on their website. This yearly statistical report provided a total number of female offenders returned to prison due to reoffending (new offense) or due to committing a number of technical violations of their rules of supervision. These data were reported to the TDCJ on a monthly basis by each parole office within Texas. This information was then compiled into a yearly statistical report. The data analysis of violating female offenders in the years 2014, 2015, and 2018 was used to answer the research questions. Creswell (2009) defined an independent variable as one that could possibly cause or influence outcomes. The independent variable for the study was the old and new assessment tools (risk) from 2014, 2015, and 2018. These two assessment tools identified risks in post incarcerated female offenders by identifying their supervision level, thereby predicting the probability of recidivating. Risk is defined as probability of reoffending. The dependent variable depends on the independent variable as it represents the outcome of the influence on the independent variables (Creswell, 2009). The dependent variable used in the analysis was recidivism, which was measured by their supervision level assigned by the two different assessments used in 2014 from 2015 and again from 2015 and 2018. Supervision level are identified as maximum, medium, and minimum for this study as it was the level assessed that

indicated whether a female offender would recidivate by having committed another criminal offense resulting in being rearrested/conviction or a technical violation in the years of 2014, 2015, and 2018 and subsequently returned to a Texas prison. Once again, recidivism was recorded by supervision level. For this study, recidivism was counted as a maximum, medium, and minimum in the cross tabulation on the chi square analysis.

Data Extraction Plan and Analysis

A written request was submitted to the TDCJ – executive services-public information officer requesting the secondary data needed to conduct the study. Although the statistical report for the years ending in 2014, 2015, and 2018 was open sourced on TDCJ website, the numbers were combined for both male and female offenders. Therefore, a written request was submitted in order to obtain the number of female offenders only. The request included a total number of female offenders who recidivated for the years ending 2014, 2015, and 2018 by supervision level. Data analysis for this study was completed once secondary data were received. The *N* sample population was the total number of female offenders who recidivated in the years of 2014, 2015, and 2018 (TDCJ- Statistical Reports). Access for the statistics was primarily found on the public website; however, the female offender numbers were requested as the numbers shown on the website were a total of both male and female offenders. Using these available data allowed me to compare the recidivism rates for the years ending in 2014, 2015, and 2018 by supervision levels in order to answer the research questions and hypotheses.

RQ1: Which assessment tool from 2014 or 2015 has impacted recidivism rates on post incarcerated female offenders in Texas?

H_01 TRAS has not reduced the recidivism rate of female offenders since implementation in 2015.

H_{a1} TRAS has significantly reduced recidivism among the post incarcerated female offender population.

RQ2: Are TRAS risk scores for female offenders better at determining risk levels, thereby lowering recidivism rates 3 years after its implementation?

H_02 TRAS is not identifying risk scores differently than in prior years in female offenders in Texas.

H_{a2} TRAS is identifying risk scores differently than in prior years in female offenders in Texas.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS and a chi-squared statistical test. The chi-square statistic is most often represented by symbol χ^2 (Rugg, 2007). Chi-square is used statistically when variables are at the nominal and ordinal levels of measurement; in other words, variables are categorical (Rugg, 2007). Briefly stated, chi-square tests provide a means of determining whether a set of observed numbers deviate significantly from a set of expected numbers (Rugg, 2007). For this study, a chi-square test of independence was used to analyze the data set (Rugg, 2007). The chi-square test is applied when researchers have two categorical variables from a single population (post incarcerated female offenders), and it evaluates whether there is a significant association between the categories of the two variables (Rugg, 2007). The chi-square test of

independence is used to analyze the frequency table (i.e., contingency table) formed by two categorical variables (Rugg, 2007). There are several types of chi square tests depending on the way the data were collected and the hypothesis being tested (Rugg, 2007).

This data analysis used a simple chi-square: a 2 x 2 contingency table to analyze the old data (2014) from the new data (2015) and (2018). This type of chi-square test uses a cross tabulation, also referred to as a bivariate table, to evaluate tests of independence (Rugg, 2007). Cross tabulation shows the distributions of two categorical variables (recidivism [by supervision levels] and both the old and new assessment tools, which identify risk) at the same time (Rugg, 2007). It also shows how these two variables intersect within the cells of the table (Rugg, 2007). The test of independence assesses whether an association exists between the two variables by comparing the observed from the expected data (Rugg, 2007). Most importantly, by calculating the chi square statistic and comparing it against a critical value from its distribution, I was able to assess whether the observed cell counts were significantly different from the expected cell counts in order to answer the research questions (see Rugg, 2007).

Threats to Validity

Internal validity most often is referred to the degree of confidence that the causal relationship being analyzed is trustworthy and not influenced by other factors or variables (Maxfield & Babbie, 2018). The key question in this study was there a correlation between the implementation of TRAS and recidivism rates among post incarcerated female offenders. Since the statistical data being provided by TDCJ appears to not

include other variables found in the total number of female offenders returning to prison by other means than by rearrests (reoffending) or due to a technical violation of their rules of supervision than as a researcher I can assume no other variables were influencing recidivism rates or the validity of the data. Since the researcher used secondary data from the TDCJ database, the variables were already present and could not be changed, chi-square was chosen to measure correlation between the old and new assessment tools in relation to recidivism. This study utilized chi-square for the same variables. Most often the threat to validity in using a chi-square test is found is in overestimating the findings, implying cause instead of association or failure to recognize a spurious relationship if using two nominal variables. The external validity of this research study was tied to the data set and its internal validity. One important aspect of external validity was that the researcher did not allow her biases to compromise the results of the study. The researcher can prove external validity for the study by making sure there were no mistakes made that would limit the ability of the study to transfer the findings to other settings in the Texas correctional system. External validity in research allows for the ability to make generalizations about the results concerning the participants, it was important for the representative sample to create generalized results; therefore, the representative sample consisted of adult female offenders from archived data gathered from the TDCJ-Parole Division. In quantitative research, reliability is just as important as validity. Most often reliability is tested in two ways usually through: test/retest and internal consistency (Maxfield & Babbie, 2018). Test/retest is the more conservative method to estimate reliability. The way to measure reliability is through internal consistency

involved measuring two different versions the same item to produce similar results (Maxwell & Babbie, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

Prior to the beginning of the data collection process that comprised this study, approval was obtained from my dissertation committee at Walden University and IRB. Upon receipt of approval from the committee to proceed with the proposed research project, I downloaded the electronic SPSS instrument for the purpose of data collection and analysis. This researcher had no direct or indirect relationship to the female offenders as the data was obtained through TDCJ Executive Services, the researcher received the data via email directly from TDCJ Executive Services. Since the researcher collected data from the TDCJ database, the data variables were already present and could not be changed. The researcher had no control over data that had been collected previously. The researcher had no control over the quality of the data. The researcher treated the collected data obtained as accurate and true. This research study did not cause the participants in the research any harm or danger. For further protection no identifying markers of the female offenders was present in the data set. An application outlining what the purpose of this study was submitted to Walden University's IRB for approval. IRB final study approval was granted on 03/04/2021: 10-13-20-0526115. Creswell (2003) posited that in order for research to receive justification of being noteworthy, the researcher must ensure the researched topic was important and significant.

Summary

The purpose of this quantitative study was to add to the existing literature on women who have been successfully reintegrated into the community for at least 3 years after release from incarceration. The research questions were reviewed and a rationale for the research design given. My role as researcher, including potential researcher bias was discussed. An explanation of the methodology used was discussed, which contained details regarding participant selection, instrumentation, and data analysis methods. Issues of trustworthiness were discussed, along with plans for reducing bias and any researcher influence that may alter the data. Finally, ethical considerations were outlined. Chapter 4 contains a detailed analysis of all data collected. The setting, participant demographics, evidence of trustworthiness and results of the study are presented and discussed in the following chapter. This chapter provided an explanation of the data procedures and the methodology used in this quantitative study. The purpose of the study was reiterated, and the relevant research questions and hypotheses were presented. As well, there was a discussion of secondary data and how it is applicable, and appropriate for this study. Accordingly, the target population, sample size and related procedures were presented. The survey instrument for this study, was the TDCJ statistical data for years of 2014, 2015 and 2018 was discussed and variables were defined. The data extraction plan and analysis procedures were presented and the ethical concerns of the study were discussed. The quasi-experimental design was deemed appropriate for this study, as the goal of quasi-experiment research was to examine whether a change occurred within the intended variables. All data was statistically analyzed using SPSS 27.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study was to validate the new risk/need assessment tool and understand whether it properly assesses the female parolee's risk levels, which then helps identify their likelihood of recidivating. This study focused on the female offender post incarceration in Texas to determine if the new assessment tool (TRAS) correctly identified female offender risk factors from the prior year's assessment tool (Wisconsin; independent variables), uniquely affecting their recidivism rates as determined by their supervision levels (dependent variable). The following research questions and hypotheses guided this study:

RQ1: Which assessment tool from 2014 or 2015 has impacted recidivism rates on post incarcerated female offenders in Texas?

H_01 : TRAS has not reduced the recidivism rate of female offenders since implementation in 2015.

H_{a1} : TRAS has significantly reduced recidivism among the post incarcerated female offender population.

RQ2: Are TRAS risk scores for female offenders better at determining risk levels, thereby lowering recidivism rates 3 years after its implementation?

H_02 : TRAS is not identifying risk scores differently than in prior years in female offenders in Texas.

H_{a2} : TRAS is identifying risk scores differently than in prior years in female offenders in Texas.

I began this chapter with an introduction of the study and research questions. The next section includes data collection, beginning with a description of the study participants from the archival data. The next section consists of the study results, and the final section summarizes the chapter. Feminist legal theory served as the theoretical foundation to assess the reliability of the new assessment tool and the research data can help shed light on its potential influence on recidivism rates.

Data Collection

Data were collected by submitting a request for information to the TDCJ Executive Services through the Public Information Office. Data were obtained from years ending in 2014, the last year of Wisconsin Assessment tool was used, and 2015, the first year TRAS was implemented to assess risk level on female parolees. The TDCJ Parole Division submits monthly the number of female offenders who are returned to prison from active supervision due to a rule infraction or new offense by risk levels for statistical purposes. The TDCJ statistical year runs from August 1st to July 31st of the following year. Because data collection were obtained by the TDCJ, it was assumed that no discrepancies exist in the data provided. The actual data collection method did not deviate from the method described in Chapter 3, and I encountered no unplanned events in the data collection process.

The data provided consisted of the total number of female offenders who returned to prison, broken down by risk levels for the years requested, 2014, 2015, and 2018. The descriptions used to identify risk levels for analysis in the year 2014 were maximum, medium, and minimum. I used the same descriptive for the years 2015 and 2018 although

TRAS risk levels were named differently; in other words, supervision of a female offender identified as minimum in 2014 was identified as low by TRAS. The TRAS moderate risk level was identified as medium for this study. TRAS high-risk levels were identified as maximum. In the year 2018, one non-reporting female offender was revoked and returned to prison and was included in the data analysis. It should be noted that this female offender was not on active supervision.

The population of interest for the chi-square study was a representative of the female offender population on active supervision within the state of Texas who were assessed by either the Wisconsin or TRAS tools or who returned to prison in the years of 2014, 2015, and 2018. The primary function of an assessment most often was to predict risk of recidivism; however, it can be used to provide information to promote success. For this study, the secondary data were proportional to the female offender population under supervision in the state of Texas. I used both the Wisconsin and the TRAS assessment, a fourth-generation risk assessment tool, to examine which assessment tool better determined success rather than failure. For the purpose of this study, success was determined by which assessment tool was predictive of recidivism.

Results

The results of a chi-square test of independence are discussed below: A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between risk and recidivism using assessment tools to determine the rate of recidivism in female offenders under supervision of the TDCJ parole division. Each of the chi-square tests used a Type 1 alpha

error of .05 ($p < .05$). This was the most crucial test performed within the quantitative phase of this study as it related to the quantitative research questions.

Descriptive Statistics RQ1

RQ1: Which assessment tool from 2014 or 2015 has impacted recidivism rates on post incarcerated female offenders in Texas?

After Walden University IRB approval, data were collected and analyzed quantitatively. Data were obtained from the TDCJ Executive Services Department- Open Records emailed to me in an Excel spreadsheet. For year ending in 2014, each of the 244 was the number of female offenders returned to the TDCJ due to either a technical violation, totaling 46, or a new offense violation, totaling 198. For the year ending in FY 2015, the first year TRAS was implemented, the number of female offenders revoked was 296. This number, like the previous year, includes those female offenders returned to prison due to either a technical total of 35 or a new offense violation total of 261. The total data of 540 were entered into SPSS to analyze the first research question. This total number was used to analyze the first research question to determine which assessment, Wisconsin or TRAS, accurately determined the risk of recidivism for female offenders. These descriptive statistics were reported in Table 1 for the total of 540 for years 2014 and 2015.

Table 1

Females Revoked and Received Into TDCJ as a Parole Violator

<u>By parole violation type</u>	<u>FY 2014</u>	<u>FY 2015</u>	<u>Total</u>
Technical only violations	46	35	81

New offense violations	198	261	459
Total	244	296	540

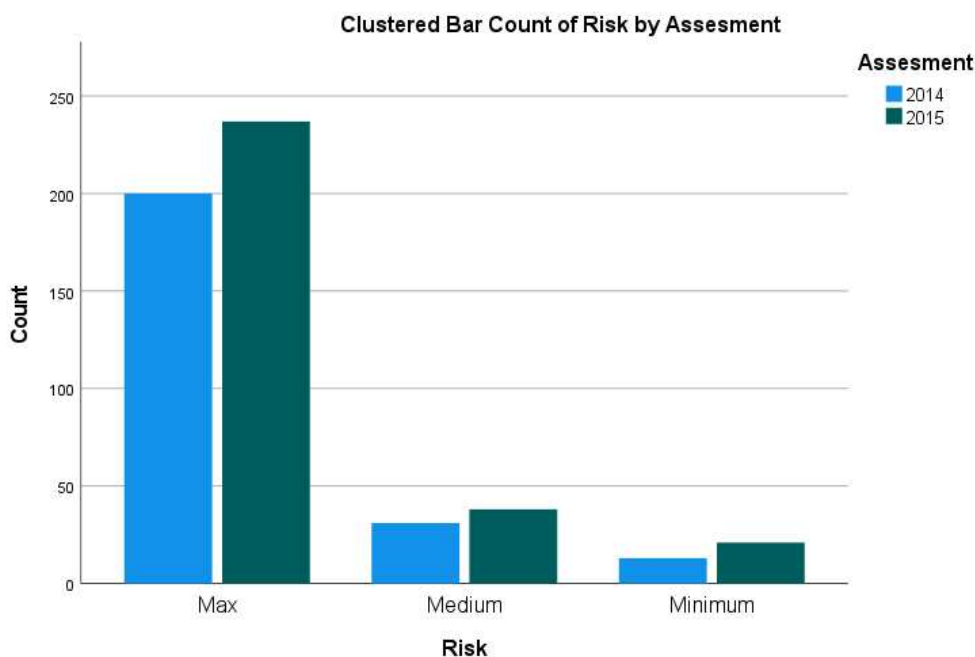
The following descriptive statistics include a breakdown of the total number of revoked female offenders by supervision level at the time of their revocation by year. For the year ending in 2014, the female offender revoked and assessed by the Wisconsin tool total was $N = 244$. The number of female offenders under maximum level supervision was 200, under medium supervision was 31, and under minimum supervision was 13, for a total of 244. For the year ending in 2015, the number of female offenders under maximum level supervision was 237, under medium supervision was 38, and under minimum supervision was 21, for a total of 296. These descriptive statistics are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

By Supervision Level at the Time of Revocation

Supervision level	FY 2014	FY 2015	Total
Maximum	200	237	437
Medium	31	38	69
Minimum	13	21	34
Total	244	296	540

Figure 1 graph includes a breakdown of Table 2

Figure 1*2014-2015 Risk*

The relation between these variables was found to not be significant, $X^2(2, N = 540) = .725, p = 0.696$ (See Table 1). For this study, an alpha level of $p < .05$ was used. This alpha value is most often and commonly used in social science research (Rugg, 2007). Chi-square statistics are reported with degrees of freedom and sample size in parentheses, the Pearson chi-square value (rounded to two decimal places), and the significance level. The total number of participants included were from years 2014, with a total of 244, and year 2015, with a total of 296. These frequencies were not found to be statistically significant, $X^2(2, N = 540) = .725, p = 0.626$. For there to be a significant relationship, the p -value needed to be equal to or low than $p < .05$. Reflected by the frequencies cross tabulated in Table 3, there is a no significant relationship between assessment and risk (recidivism) during the years ending in 2014 and 2015. Therefore,

because of the results from the chi square test, RQ1 was rejected, and the null hypothesis was accepted. See Table 3.

H_01 : TRAS has not reduced the recidivism rate of female offenders since implementation in 2015.

Table 3

RQ1 Results

Chi-square tests			
	Value	<i>df</i>	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	.725 ^a	2	.696
Likelihood ratio	.733	2	.693
Linear-by-linear association	.569	1	.451
<i>N</i> of valid cases	540		

Several factors may have affected the results in the analysis of the first research question. First, there was a question whether the 1-year time frame was too soon for many female offenders to be assessed by TRAS in 2015 prior to being revoked and returned to prison. The second question was whether too many female offenders remained on maximum supervision due to their conditions of release imposed by the board. The third question was whether there was parole officer bias toward the female offender to keep her on intensive supervision. As seen in Figure 1, a bar graph is a simple comparison breakdown of the total number of female offenders returned to supervision in the years of 2014 and 2015 by risk levels.

Descriptive Statistics RQ2

RQ2: Are TRAS risk scores for female offenders better at determining risk levels, thereby lowering recidivism rates 3 years after its implementation?

RQ2 is assessed TRAS the year it was implemented from 3 years later in 2018. The data for the year ending in 2015 for each of the 296 was the number of female offenders returned to the TDCJ due to either a technical violation, totaling 35, or a new offense violation, totaling 261. For the year ending in FY 2018, 3 years after TRAS was implemented, the number of female offenders revoked was 391. This number, like the previous year, included those female offenders returned to prison due to either a technical violation, totaling 60, or a new offense violation, totaling 331. The total data of 687 were entered into SPSS to analyze the second research question. This total number was used to analyze the second research question to determine if TRAS accurately determined the risk of recidivism for female offenders effectively 3 years after its implementation. These descriptive statistics were reported in Table 4 for the total of 687 for years 2015 and 2018.

Table 4

Females Revoked and Received Into TDCJ as a Parole Violator

By parole violation type	FY 2015	FY 2018	Total
Technical only violations	35	60	95
New offense violations	261	331	592
Total	296	391	687

The following descriptive statistics include a breakdown of the total number of revoked female offenders by supervision level at the time of their revocation by year. For the year ending in 2015, the female offender revoked and assessed during the first year of

TRAS totaled 296. The number of female offenders under maximum level supervision was 237, under medium supervision was 38, and under minimum supervision was 21, for a total of 296. For the year ending in 2018, the total of number of female offenders revoked assessed completely by TRAS was a total number of 391. This total was made of female offenders under maximum level supervision, 369, under medium supervision, nine, under minimum supervision, 12, and under non-reporting status, one, for a total of 391. These descriptive statistics are reported in Table 5.

Table 5

By Supervision Level at the Time of Revocation

Supervision level	FY 2015	FY 2015	Total
Maximum	237	369	606
Medium	38	9	47
Minimum	21	12	33
Non-reporting	0	1	1
Total	296	391	687

For RQ2, the results were very different. The relationship or association between these variables was found to be statistically significant, $X^2(2, N = 687) = 36.082, p < .001$ (see Table 5). Chi-square statistics are reported with degrees of freedom and sample size in parentheses, the Pearson chi-square value (rounded to two decimal places), and the significance level. The total number of participants included were from years 2015, totaling 296 and year 2018, totaling 391. These frequencies were found to be statistically significant, $X^2(2, N = 687) = 36.082, p < .000$. This is reflected by the frequencies cross tabulated in Table 5; there is a significant relationship between assessment and risk

(recidivism) during the years ending in 2015 and 2018. Therefore, due to the results of the chi square test, RQ2 was accepted, and the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 6

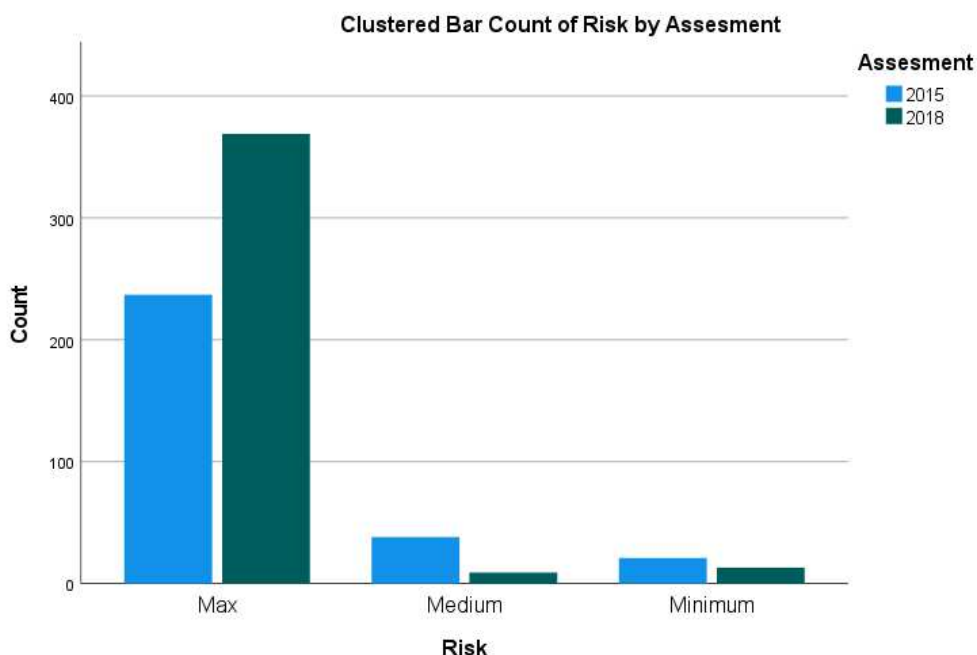
RQ2 Results

Chi-square tests			
	Value	<i>df</i>	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	36.082 ^a	2	.000
Likelihood ratio	36.954	2	.000
Linear-by-linear association	23.059	1	.000
<i>N</i> of valid cases	687		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 14.65.

Several factors may have affected the results in the analysis of the second research question. First, offenders most often reoffend within 3 years of release. Two, many female offenders needed to remain on maximum supervision as a condition of release imposed by the board. Thirdly, the number of female offenders assessed high by TRAS is 137 more than those assessed three years prior. Figure 2 a bar graph included below is a simple comparison breakdown of the total number of female offenders returned to supervision in the years of 2015 and 2018 by risk levels.

Figure 2 shows a comparison of the female offender revoked ending in the years of 2015 and 2018.

Figure 2*2015-2018 Risk*

Summary

Summarizing both research questions were as follows: RQ 1 was rejected and the null hypothesis was “failed to be rejected” due to the findings of p-value of .626 determined by the chi- square analysis; this meant that there was no distinction in determining recidivism rates in either the years of 2014 from those in 2015 when TRAS was instituted. Meaning there was no difference in assessments tools in determining risk rates. The results for RQ 2 found that “failed to be rejected” meaning it was accepted and the null hypothesis was rejected as the data analysis found a significant association with assessment and risk between the years of 2015 from 2018. Study findings are further

discussed in Chapter 5. Conclusions, implications and recommendations are also discussed. Areas for future research are also presented.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study was to understand the effects of having a gender specific assessment tool used to predict recidivism rates in post incarcerated female offenders. This study of recidivism not only focused specifically on the female offender in Texas, it also gathered data specific to the tools used to assess risk.

The two research questions for this study were as follows: RQ1: Which assessment tool from 2014 or 2015 has impacted recidivism rates on post incarcerated female offenders in Texas? RQ2: Are TRAS risk scores for female offenders better at determining risk levels, thereby lowering recidivism rates 3 years after its implementation. The key findings of this study revealed two very different analyses. Data analysis of the first research question found no difference in recidivism rates of female offenders in the year after implementation of TRAS and the old risk assessment tool. In answering the second research question, the data analysis found a significant relationship between recidivism and the assessed risk scores of TRAS 2015 from 2018, 3 years following the implementation of TRAS.

Interpretation of the Findings

Both research questions in this study focused on exploring the assessment tools used to analyze the risk and recidivism rates of female offenders' post incarceration in the state of Texas. Answering these questions was essential to facilitate a female offender's successful reentry and journey while on supervision. The findings confirmed both the literature review and feminist legal theory framework used in the study, which help to

explain the rationale for using a gender specific assessment on the female offender in Texas. Secondly and most importantly, feminist legal theory seeks to change women's status through a reworking of the law and its approach to gender (Ferguson, 2017). The feminists' legal theory was often viewed as a critique of U.S. law and how they were male dominated and how the treatment of women was often overlooked. The basic idea behind the feminist legal theory was to change the way women were treated and how judges applied the law to keep women in a subordinate position (Ferguson, 2017). Most feminist legal theorists use this theory in the context that women's subordinate position in society is based on gender assumptions that are then transferred to the criminal justice system. This study's findings helped to confirm the importance of having an effective assessment tool to determine those female offenders who are most at risk of recidivating and returning to prison. Predicting who will return to prison is essential to provide pre- and post-release interventions and support and help break the cycle of criminality. Accomplishing this is difficult as there is no unifying theory of criminality for female offenders from which to draw, and those available have been developed primarily by studies on males (Conlin, 2017). As stated earlier, the importance of these assessment tools is their ability to identify and predict which female offender is at risk of recidivating. Assessing female offender criminogenic and treatment needs is the first step toward developing an individualized treatment plan. Covington (2007) argued for assessment instruments that consider the distinctive needs of female offenders. Covington (2007) They believed that programs used for female offenders need to consider the larger social concerns of income level; physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; race; and gender

inequality, along with the individual elements that affect females in the criminal justice system.

A growing body of research has faulted existing risk–need assessment models for neglecting the risk factors most appropriate to female offenders (Van Voorhis, 2012). In response, a sequence of gender-responsive assessment models were tested, and, subsequently, these models' contributions were added to gender-neutral assessments. However, results for both gender-neutral and gender-responsive areas suggested different treatment priorities for females from those currently put forward in correctional theory and policy (Van Voorhis, 2012). The evidence in this research highlighted the necessity to consider the unique needs of female offenders in assessment, programming, and correctional policy.

Risk assessment and classification methods for females have been largely derived from male-based classifications (Van Voorhis, 2012). As a result, many of the unique needs of females are neither formally assessed nor treated. Emerging research supporting a gender-responsive approach to the custody and treatment of female offenders has suggested that needs such as abuse, substance abuse, relationship difficulties, mental health self-esteem, self-worth, and parenting issues are important treatment goals. Although these needs may be universal among female offenders, their relationships with future offending have not been sufficiently tested.

Limitations

There are limitations inherent in the design, the use of archival data, and the study processes. The first limitation could be found as a result of the use of archival data for the

analysis received from TDCJ Executive Services. Data were collected and stored by individuals other than the researcher; therefore, the data collected might not be to my standard.

Another possible limitation of the current study was the data examined do not provide the demographic breakdown of female offenders who were revoked and returned to prison; this information could have possibly explained which demographic/ethnicity is most at risk of recidivating. Another possible limitation with the data could be an element of starting bias that cannot be quantified. Supervising officers can submit recommendations to the parole board requesting a female remain on maximum supervision based on their biases even when the assessment tool assesses a lower supervision level. Some officers may be hesitant to support a lower risk score due to their fear of being responsible if the offender commits a new crime or because of an existing racial bias, for example. However, it is important to recognize that supervisors are ultimately responsible for the approval or denial of assessments scored by an officer although rarely is a risk changed by an immediate supervisor. Despite these limitations, original data with a large sample size were used, which indicated a need for further exploration into the use of TRAS and possibility of yearly or biyearly retraining for officers on updated versions of TRAS. Future studies should examine the benefits of using TRAS or any assessment tool as early as in presentencing to filter out any low-risk female offender from entering the criminal justice system.

Recommendations

In this study, I focused on exploring the old and new assessment tools used in predicting female offender risk and recidivism rates. TRAS assessment uses the female offender's past experiences and criminal history to determine their probability of reoffending based on their risk score. In this assessment, I reviewed and determined which risk factors contribute to their success or failure after release. Adding to existing research, the findings of this study suggest action that can be taken to improve outcomes for women reentering the community by exploring the possibility of using an assessment tool early on in the criminal justice system as early as pretrial to filter out low risk female offender from entering the system. Specific recommendations for implementation either while incarcerated, after incarceration, or both, are discussed next. A new risk assessment tool can be implemented to assess new female offenders at every junction of the TCJS from probation, prison, and reentry programs. The assessment can be modified along the way if the offenders' risk or needs change. This risk assessment can prioritize who to detain, who to supervise, and who is in most need of treatment and services. By using a risk score along with the type of offense committed, recommendations can be made to the courts or parole board by probation and/or parole officers on who to detain or release. This would depend on an individual's classification based on her risk assessment, ranging from minimum, medium, and maximum. The risk assessment can determine her risk of failure to appear for court and who is at a higher risk of reoffending by committing another crime. Thus, reforms can be implemented into criminal justice

policies at every aspect of the criminal justice system to ensure that resources are used more effectively on high-risk offenders, which in turn would help to lower recidivism.

While inside the prison system, reintegration officers provide programs that could teach female offenders who are reentering society about the steps that are necessary for them to succeed. Upon release, parole officers should have readily available community resources and treatment programs on hand specific to meet the needs assessed by TRAS in order to meet the needs of the female offender to mitigate recidivism. Research has shown that these types of programs are more cost effective than incarceration in reducing the recidivism rate. For example, the availability of gender-specific substance abuse treatment programs are the key to making lasting changes for female offenders. Supportive groups may help empower women to make positive life choices after release. There are certain personal traits that are conducive to success during reentry to the community. Believing in personal accountability and possessing positive motivators that are more valuable than the things associated with a criminal lifestyle are paramount to success after release. Any female who has noncriminal goals and the determination to achieve those goals is more likely to be aggressive about finding employment, pursuing an education, and tackling the other necessary tasks to be successful upon reentry. A female offender has to be ready for change to embrace what she is learning in programs in order to leave behind her criminal lifestyle. Using a feminist theoretical lens, the disadvantages females face after incarceration become clear as well as the opportunities these women are missing because of these disadvantages. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the differences in male and female offender populations.

Ideally, society should offer female offender services and treat them in a way that levels the playing field for them. Beginning in prison, female offenders must be treated as individuals, with programs and approaches designed with gender differences in mind.

Implications

The implications for social change resulting from this study are significant because these findings contribute to the body of research aimed at female offenders and their perception of contributing factors to their success after incarceration. Specific suggestions are offered to help interested parties assess a female offender differently than that of the male offender and then offering gender specific programs and services. This study can assist policymakers in identifying appropriate policies to address the increase of female offenders in the criminal justice system. Some of those plans need to include a correct assessment of the female offender to facilitate the lower risk and entry of female offender into the criminal justice system. These plans need to include treatments upon release to the community and provide gender-specific treatments. Gender-specific programs targeted specifically for women could lead to better outcomes for lowering the risk of female offenders returning to prison. Many researchers have also suggested that female offenders have gender sensitive programs available both inside and outside of prison that lessen the likelihood of recidivism. The increasing rate of female offenders in the contemporary society is becoming a complex issue that requires the attention of policymakers, the offenders and their families, the criminal justice system, and the community as a whole.

Gender differences were not considered in earlier research. Policies should be based on thorough understanding of the factors that have influenced women's effort to reenter the community (Sawyer, 2018). Policy makers should also understand the trajectories that have condemned women to prison in the first place. Moreover, policy makers should realize that the current justice system is designed to punish criminals by incarceration (Sawyer, 2018). These policies changes could have an important impact on the female parolees. The social implications of this study include an increase in awareness of female offenders who are assessed with many risk factors, such as mental health disorders, substance use disorders, and family issues, which can lead to reduced rearrests of the female offender.

As early as the pretrial sentence report completes a risk/needs assessment focusing on each female's individual history, including family/peers, education, financial, drug or alcohol abuse, criminal attitudes, and history, then there needs to be a design plan to teach her to conquer and eliminate her criminal behavior or lifestyle. Continuing with providing a new assessment at every junction of the criminal justice system can help reintegrate the individual and therefore lower her chances of reoffending.

Current trends seem to acknowledge the need for evidence-based practices at every junction of the criminal justice system. Support is building for the use of the risk/need's assessment tool. A good assessment is seen to have numerous positive benefits to female offenders by targeting low risk offenders and helping to transition them out of the system through treatment. Evidence-based practices also help provide new policies by creating new treatment and services specific to the female offender. Once a

risk assessment has been completed by a properly trained assessor, it helps by providing judges different choices other than jail or prison. Evidence-based practices also have a measurable outcome, provide feedback of positive or negative results, and allow for adjustments for setbacks

Conclusion

This was a quantitative study examining the assessments from 2014, 2015, and 2018. This study covered the benefits of implementing TRAS. I also discussed the need to develop new gender specific resources, treatments, and programs to lower recidivism for female offenders. This tool could also affect lower jail and prison costs by developing new diversion programs instead of prison. Recommendations were made that could possibly improve female reentry by eliminating some of the challenges. First, parole officers may be encouraged to be less strict and more helpful by providing resources in keeping their parolees from resorting to criminal activity. In addition, communities should come together and improve hiring practices by eliminating background checks on those who are known ex-felons. Furthermore, housing authorities should be willing to assist ex-offenders obtain housing by supplying vouchers to those on the lower economic scale. Education is another important factor in the prevention of recidivism. All ex-female offenders should receive assistance with going back to school. The offender, the community, and community supervision would improve if the women were better equipped to be self-sufficient by legal means. I recommend more research on this matter. There is more to be understood about the challenges of female offender reentry and the elimination of the challenges that affect their returning to a normal life.

The study has revealed the importance of properly monitoring the assessment tool continuously to make ensure it is being used correctly. The ability to capitalize on the assessment efficacy on predicting risk of female offenders reoffending can help to develop supervision strategies that alert parole officers to the needs areas where programs and treatment may directly effect a positive behavioral change in a female offender they are supervising. By constantly modifying TRAS, both the TDCJ and its parole and reentry officers can make the difference in a female offender's success or failure.

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