



# Research at a glance

## Revalidation of the Custody Rating Scale for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Women Offenders

**KEY WORDS:** *Custody Rating Scale, security classification, women offenders, Aboriginal offenders*

### Why we did this study

The Custody Rating Scale (CRS), an actuarial measure of institutional adjustment and security risk, is used in conjunction with the professional judgment of staff and psychological assessment, if applicable, to determine a woman offender's initial security classification. The CRS was developed using a sample of non-Aboriginal male offenders almost 25 years ago, and some have since expressed concerns regarding the use of the CRS with woman offenders, especially those of Aboriginal ethnicity. For this reason, a revalidation study was undertaken to examine the CRS as it is used with women offenders

### What we did

The study focused on three themes. First, the validity of the CRS was examined. Second, the use of the CRS specifically with Aboriginal women offenders was examined. Finally, exploratory analyses were conducted to explore the predictive ability of factors not included in the CRS.

All CRSs ( $N = 628$ ) completed for women offenders in 2008 and 2009 were included in the study.

### What we found

As expected, offenders with higher security classifications (reflecting the CRS results, the staff member's professional judgment, and psychological assessment, if applicable) had higher risk ratings, greater needs, lower reintegration potential, and lower motivation than those with a lower security classification. Higher security classifications were also associated with involvement in serious institutional misconducts and returns to custody with a new offence, while lower security classifications were associated with the granting of parole.

There was no evidence that either the security classification as a whole or the CRS recommendation was over-classifying Aboriginal women. The results of

the current study suggest that the over-representation of Aboriginal women at higher security levels is due to their higher level of risk and poorer institutional adjustment rather than a bias in initial security classification.

Finally, a preliminary analysis revealed that for non-Aboriginal offenders a measure of substance abuse was associated with institutional misconduct, while a measure of marital / family need was associated with the granting of parole and rates of return to custody. If modifications to the CRS or the initial security classification approach used with women are eventually undertaken, these factors may merit consideration.

### What it means

The results indicate that the current initial security classification approach used with women offenders – that is, the consideration of CRS results, staff's professional judgment, and psychological assessment – continues to be valid and appropriate for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women offenders. There was no evidence the CRS over-classifies Aboriginal women.

### For more information

Barnum, G. & Gobeil, R. (2012). *Revalidation of the custody rating scale for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women offenders*. Research Report R-273. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

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