Why we did this study

Security classification reviews occur throughout the period of incarceration to ensure that offenders are placed at security levels that are appropriate to the offender’s risk of institutional misconduct, including threat to public safety posed by escapes from custody. The Security Reclassification Scale for Women (SRSW) is used, in conjunction with professional judgement, to determine a woman’s security level after initial classification. The goal of the current research was to assess the utility of the SRSW to ensure it is reliable and valid.

What we did

The final sample of SRSW reviews included 645 reviews completed for a total 499 women offenders. The reviews were finalized between April 1, 2014 and March 31, 2017. SRSW reviews were included when a CRS which was used for initial security level placement (i.e., Offender Security Level (OSL)) was present on the same term. Both reliability and validity (convergent and predictive) were assessed, where possible, analyses were conducted separately by Indigenous identity.

What we found

Findings showed that the majority of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women were recommended for minimum or medium security placement. The proportion of women allocated to each level of security did not vary significantly by Indigenous identity.

Although reviews generally occurred in a timely manner, 15% of women had a review which occurred after the two-year review window had passed.

Discordant decisions that occurred outside of the discretionary ranges and operational policy were made relatively often and above traditionally recommended levels. When rationales for the discordant decisions were available, caseworkers often referenced the offenders’ current behaviour and attitude. Aboriginal Social History factors were often considered for Indigenous women.

The SRSW was generally found to be a reliable and valid classification tool:

- Most SRSW items were found to be weakly to moderately associated with the total score, with acceptable internal consistency.
- With regards to convergent validity, both the SRSW security level recommendations and the final security level decisions were weakly to moderately associated with ratings of risk and reintegration potential.
- An assessment of the predictive validity of the SRSW for institutional and community outcomes found that both SRSW security level recommendations and final security level decisions were moderately to strongly related to institutional offences, strongly related to discretionary release decisions, and weakly related to revocations of conditional release.

What it means

These results support the continued use of the SRSW to inform the security classification review process in CSC. Although continued use is merited, consideration should be given to implementing methods to improve the timing of reviews for particular groups of women offenders and the rate of final placement decisions inconsistent with the scale results.

For more information


To obtain a PDF version of the full report, or for other inquiries, please e-mail the Research Branch or contact us by phone at (613) 995-3975.

You can also visit the Research Publications section for a full list of reports and one-page summaries.