



## Brief article

## Gender as a Moderator in Predicting Re-Arrest Among Treated Drug-Involved Offenders



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## ABSTRACT

The primary aim of the current study is to explore gender differences on the relationships of pre-treatment risk factors and psychosocial functioning with time to re-arrest following termination from prison. The sample consisted of 384 males and 313 females who were admitted to four prison-based substance abuse treatment programs. Results showed that female inmates experienced a longer time to re-arrest than male inmates. Higher self-reported ratings of decision making confidence and peer support were associated with a lower likelihood of re-arrest for males. Males with higher self-esteem ratings were more likely to be re-arrested than males who reported lower self-esteem. Females with more self-reported criminal involvement had a higher rate of re-arrest than did those with less criminal involvement. In contrast to males, females with relatively high self-reported self-esteem had a lower rate of re-arrest than their counterparts who reported low self-esteem. Clinical implications include the importance of enhancing decision-making confidence and peer support for males and self-esteem for females.

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## 1. Introduction

Criminal history and substance use severity have been found to be associated with re-offending and post-treatment substance use (Evans, Huang, & Hser, 2011; Hawken, 2008; Moos, Finney, & Cronkite, 1990). Criminal history not only directly predicts a high likelihood of re-arrest, but also is associated with high levels of criminal thinking and low levels of treatment engagement, which in turn predict a higher probability of re-arrest (Yang et al., 2013). Furthermore, high recidivism rates (e.g., 68% of prisoners are typically re-arrested within 3 years post-release, Langan & Levin, 2002) suggest that a large proportion of individuals with past criminal involvement will recidivate in the future. Drug use severity also has been found to be associated with a higher likelihood of re-arrest (Du, Huang, Zhao, & Hser, 2013). Many parolees are returned to prison as a result of violating their conditions of parole because of substance abuse (Lynch & Sabol, 2001). Drug use also has been found to significantly impair young men's ability to mature out of delinquency (Welte, Barnes, Hoffman, Wieczorek, & Zhang, 2005; Zhang, Welte, & Wieczorek, 2002). For example, among a sample of young delinquent men, alcohol dependence and negative consequences of drug use were found to be associated with a more rapid increase in criminal activity (Welte et al., 2005). Moreover, studies involving drug

treatment clients have demonstrated that reduced drug use is associated with reduced posttreatment criminal activities (Anglin & Perrochet, 1998; Farabee, Shen, Hser, Grella, & Anglin, 2001; Federal Bureau of Prisons, 1998; Fletcher, Tims, & Brown, 1997), further supporting the link between drug use severity and criminal conduct.

While drug treatment for those involved in the criminal justice system typically addresses both drug use and criminal activity, the effectiveness of treatment often is moderated by gender. Hser, Huang, Teruya, and Anglin (2003) found that in comparison to female drug treatment clients, male clients reported greater criminal involvement at baseline and more crimes at follow-up. The authors also discovered gender-specific predictors of a lower likelihood of crime desistance, including legal involvement and lower treatment readiness at baseline for women, and legal involvement, use of multiple drugs, and not living with children for men. Research also has revealed gender differences in posttreatment drug use, which is a potential influencing factor on criminal behaviors. For example, Green, Polen, Lynch, Dickinson, and Bennett (2004) found that men and women were similar in the rate of treatment completion, but they differed significantly on posttreatment drug abstinence. Specifically, female completers were abstinent from drug use nine times longer than were female non-completers, whereas male completers were abstinent three times longer than their male non-completer counterparts (Green et al., 2004).

The reasons for different treatment outcomes between genders are complex but may be attributed to different life experiences and substance use backgrounds. Women are more likely to initiate substance use as a result of traumatic life events and often are introduced to substance use by their male partners and family

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members, whereas men often are drawn into drugs by their peers and friends (Henderson, Boyd, & Mieczkowski, 1994; Nelson-Zlupko, Kauffman, & Dore, 1995; Semple, Grant, & Patterson, 2004). Male offenders are more likely than female offenders to commit violent crimes, have prior criminal histories, and return to prison; female offenders are more likely to commit property or drug-related crimes (Harrison & Beck, 2006; Henderson, 1998). Females also are more likely to report sexual abuse, mental illness, marital stress, and the absence of positive social support in the recovery process (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Greenfeld & Snell, 1999; Office of Applied Studies, 2003; Spjeldnes & Goodkind, 2009; Walitzer & Dearing, 2006). From a life-course perspective, men and women differ in various aspects of their substance use and recovery.

In addition to treatment effectiveness and drug use background, gender also has been found to be an important moderator in other relationships, such as between self-esteem and delinquency. One study found that high self-esteem predicted less delinquency for girls but not boys (Kort-Butler, 2006). Based on a sample of 581 women from 35 homeless shelters and recovery programs, another study found that higher self-esteem predicted lower depression and fewer substance use problems; childhood abuse also had indirect impacts on depression and substance use problems and was mediated by physical abuse and self-esteem (Stein, Leslie, & Nyamathi, 2002). Female juveniles were more likely than their male counterparts to endorse negative self-esteem statements in terms of wanting more self-respect, feeling useless, being a failure, and being “no good at all” (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006). Similarly, Broidy and Angew (1997) claimed that men had a stronger sense of mastery and self-esteem than did women and were more likely to respond to anger and strain by committing crime.

Offenders and substance users often display poor decision making, impulsivity, and risk-taking behaviors with little concern for the consequences of their actions (Grant, Contoreggi, & London, 2000; Syngelaki, Moore, Savage, Fairchild, & van den Bosch, 2009). With respect to decision making and risk taking, women are more risk averse than men in making decisions and tend to make less risky decisions under uncertainty (Eckel & Grossman, 2002; Lighthall, Mather, & Gorlick, 2009). Studies based on laboratory decision tasks have found that men tend to make more high-risk, disadvantageous choices under stress, while women tend to make more low-risk, advantageous choices (Lighthall et al., 2009; van den Bosch, Harteveld, & Stoop, 2009). These findings suggest that males would be more likely than females to misjudge the costs and benefits of their action and engage in risk-taking behaviors, which may eventually lead to deviant behaviors. A meta-analysis comparing risk taking between male and female adolescents found that males were more likely than females to self-report risky behaviors (e.g., drinking/drug use, sexual activities, driving) and an earlier onset of these behaviors (Byrnes, Miller, & Schafer, 1999). In light of these findings, further research is needed to provide a better understanding of the role gender plays in moderating these relationships in criminal justice populations.

Finally, the relationship between social support and criminal activity is another variable potentially moderated by gender (Cullen, 1994; Hochstetler, DeLisi, & Pratt, 2010). One study with a sample of 1289 young adults found that social support was a significant protective factor in terms of buffering the negative impact of strain on delinquency for females, but was not found to be a protective factor for males (Robbers, 2004). This finding could be attributed to women reporting more social support and a greater likelihood of utilizing social support to cope with stress in comparison to what men report (Robbers, 2004).

This study examines pretreatment risks (i.e., criminal history, substance abuse severity) and psychosocial functioning (i.e., self-esteem, decision-making confidence, risk taking, social support, and peer support) of offenders having received substance abuse treatment and recently released from prison, and assesses if the relationship between these

factors and post-treatment re-arrest is moderated by gender. Specifically, it is hypothesized that gender serves as a moderator: (1) female offenders will not only be less likely than their male counterparts to be arrested after release from prison, but among those arrested, females also will have a longer time to re-arrest; (2) the influence of pretreatment risks and psychosocial functioning on re-arrest will differ between genders.

## 2. Materials and method

### 2.1. Participants

The current study used data from the Disease Risk Reduction (DRR) project (R01DA025885, W. E. K. Lehman, Principal Investigator). Participants were clients from four residential prison-based treatment facilities in a southwestern state. All four facilities were classified as minimum security and operated as stand-alone substance abuse treatment programs. Two facilities were all-male units and two were all-female units. The duration of the programs ranged from 6 to 10 months. The study included participants who (1) agreed to participate in the DRR project (Lehman et al., 2014), (2) completed the baseline surveys (i.e., TCU Short Forms), and (3) had criminal records in the public safety system. Participants were recruited between February 2010 and November 2011, and provided written informed consent approved by the Texas Christian University (TCU) IRB. Out of 831 participants, 698 completed the TCU Short Forms that were used in the study; 697 had documented criminal history information. Participants were released from prison shortly after being discharged from the treatment program. Participants included 384 males (55%) and 313 females (45%), with a mean age of 35 (range: 18–67) years (see Table 1). Males were evenly distributed across ethnic groups (e.g., 32% white, 30% African American); among the female participants, the majority were white (60%), followed by African American (23%).

**Table 1**  
Sample characteristics and predictive and dependent variable means (standard deviations).

Characteristics/ variables	Total (N = 697)	Male (n = 384)	Female (n = 313)	p <sup>a</sup>
Ethnicity <sup>b</sup>				
Caucasian	44%	32%	60%	
African American	27%	30%	23%	
Hispanic	28%	38%	16%	
Other	1%	0	1%	
Age (mean; range) <sup>c</sup>	35 (18–67)	35 (18–67)	36 (19–61)	
Variable means (SDs)				
Pretreatment risks				
Substance abuse severity	4.91 (2.93)	4.11 (2.84)	5.89 (2.74)	<.001
Criminal history	3.49 (0.60)	3.64 (0.56)	3.32 (0.61)	<.001
Psychosocial functioning				
Self-esteem	35.53 (7.99)	37.53 (6.67)	33.07 (8.77)	<.001
Decision making confidence	36.43 (5.59)	37.57 (5.07)	35.03 (5.87)	<.001
Social support	42.14 (5.43)	42.03 (5.13)	42.28 (5.79)	.55
Peer support	37.46 (7.13)	37.24 (7.19)	37.73 (7.05)	.38
Risk taking	31.36 (7.70)	30.33 (6.93)	32.62 (8.39)	<.001
Felony Re-arrest	16%	20%	12%	.004
Time to re-arrest (median, range in days)	485 (33–972)	484 (51–972)	503 (33–820)	

<sup>a</sup> Gender differences in the variables.

<sup>b</sup> Results of the chi-square test indicated that the distribution of participants in ethnic groups was different across genders,  $\chi^2(2) = 47.35$   $p < .001$ . The ethnic group “Other” was excluded in the chi-square test because the frequency in this group was less than 5.

<sup>c</sup> There was no age difference between gender groups,  $t = 1.47$ ,  $p = .14$ .

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