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# Girls Study Group

*Understanding and Responding to Girls' Delinquency*

Jeff Slowikowski, Acting Administrator

## Suitability of Assessment Instruments for Delinquent Girls

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*According to data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, from 1991 to 2000, arrests of girls increased more (or decreased less) than arrests of boys for most types of offenses. By 2004, girls accounted for 30 percent of all juvenile arrests. However, questions remain about whether these trends reflect an actual increase in girls' delinquency or changes in societal responses to girls' behavior. To find answers to these questions, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) convened the Girls Study Group to establish a theoretical and empirical foundation to guide the development, testing, and dissemination of strategies to reduce or prevent girls' involvement in delinquency and violence.*

*The Girls Study Group Series, of which this Bulletin is a part, presents the Group's findings. The series examines issues such as patterns of offending among adolescents and how they differ for girls and boys; risk and protective factors associated with delinquency, including gender differences; and the causes and correlates of girls' delinquency.*

Juvenile justice policymakers have focused growing attention on girls in recent years, in part because of an increase in female arrests and as a result of Federal requirements in the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. Although the overall total of juvenile

arrests in the United States dropped about 22 percent between 1996 and 2005, arrests of males decreased 29 percent, whereas arrests of females decreased only 14 percent. Furthermore, male arrests for violent crimes decreased more substantially (28



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percent) than did female arrests (10 percent) (Zahn et al., 2008). Although their justice system involvement has been increasing, girls have received scant attention until the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) required States to “develop and adopt policies to prohibit gender bias in placement and treatment” (Bownes and Albert, 1996).<sup>1</sup> Meeting this mandate requires that practitioners and policymakers understand gender differences that may lead to system biases.

Standardized instruments are tools juvenile justice practitioners use to identify individuals who pose some sort of risk (e.g., recidivism) or to identify problem areas (e.g., substance abuse, mental health). These instruments can facilitate the collection of preliminary information critical to security and treatment decisions.

Within the justice system, instruments can be used for various purposes and at many points in time. For example, instruments can be used—

### Authors' Note

The purpose of this review is to determine the extent to which assessment instruments used with at-risk and justice-involved youth are equally appropriate and effective in assessing girls and boys. The authors reviewed hundreds of instruments across a wide variety of assessment areas to examine considerations of gender in the development of each instrument as well as subsequent research that involves analyses by gender. The information contained in this Bulletin is primarily directed toward juvenile justice practitioners but may also be of interest to researchers and instrument developers interested in effective measurement.

- Prior to sentencing—to inform placement decisions or identify youth who may be appropriate candidates for diversion programs.
- In correctional facilities and probation departments—to inform appropriate security classifications or treatment and aid in release planning.
- In treatment facilities—to guide case managers in planning services and assessing treatment progress.

In each of these settings, practitioners can use standardized instruments once for initial screening purposes or at regular intervals to gauge changes over time and guide modifications to security levels or treatment services.

To make appropriate processing decisions (filing, adjudication, detention), juvenile justice practitioners—including judges, attorneys, case managers, and corrections and probation staff—may rely in part on standardized instruments to determine the risks and treatment needs of youth entering and involved in the justice system. Using such tools helps systematize decisionmaking criteria across the juvenile justice system.

Recently, because of the increase in the prevalence of girls in the juvenile justice system and heightened public awareness regarding issues concerning girls and gender,<sup>2</sup> practitioners and policymakers have begun to question whether the instruments currently in use are appropriate for girls. Literature has indicated that gender is an important variable in understanding delinquent behavior and must be addressed when developing assessment tools.

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## Background and Methods

No research has systematically examined the extent to which existing adolescent instruments used in the juvenile justice system are equally effective for girls and boys. OJJDP's Girls Study Group (GSG) conducted such a study and has summarized the findings in this Bulletin.<sup>3</sup> OJJDP will make detailed information about each instrument highlighted and reviewed in this Bulletin available on their Web site (<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/programs/girlsdelinquency.html>).

### Examining Two Categories of Instruments

Two broad types of instruments were relevant to the GSG examination: **risk assessment instruments** used to assess the risk of outcomes (e.g., recidivism) and **treatment-focused instruments** used to assist in the screening and diagnosis of conditions (e.g., mental health disorders).

**Risk assessment instruments** are used to predict or assess the potential risk of various outcomes. These instruments are usually developed by analyzing historical cases to determine the factors that best predict the subsequent behavior of interest. For example, a traditional risk assessment tool developed for use in correctional facilities might be based on a historical sample of juveniles in the justice system that is used to determine the characteristics that best predicted subsequent offending. These characteristics might include "static" factors, such as offense type or prior justice system involvement, and "dynamic" factors, such as education level or mental health status. These instruments are usually tested on the "typical" juvenile justice population, composed largely of boys, without an oversampling of girls.

**Treatment-focused instruments** identify conditions without predicting subsequent behavior. These instruments typically identify the presence of mental health conditions and substance abuse problems, but they may also measure positive and negative behaviors. Some instruments perform a global needs assessment to determine possible areas for treatment and services. Because the risk and protective factors, conditions, and disorders that these instruments identify can differ by gender, examining the effectiveness of instruments with regard to gender is essential. For example, using a mental health screening instrument that does not appropriately consider gender may result in a missed opportunity for service or placement of a child in an inappropriate treatment program.

### Considerations When Examining Gender

Two main factors should be considered when examining gender-based performance of instruments:

- Whether the instrument has **gender-based development** (e.g., gender-specific norming or validation,<sup>4</sup> gender-specific instruments or items, or gender-specific scoring systems).
- The results of **gender-based analyses** that have been performed (e.g., gender differences in scores or psychometrics, that is, tests to determine the reliability or validity of the instrument).

Some background on each of these factors is described here.

**Gender-based development.** The primary type of gender-based instrument development is the process



of norming or validating an instrument separately by gender. The terms "norming" and "validation" should be distinguished because they are applied differently for the two types of instruments described above. Treatment-focused instruments are generally described as being normed, whereas risk assessment instruments that predict risk are generally described as being validated.

A normed instrument allows the user to compare a numerical score of a particular individual to the average scores of the norming population representative of the person being tested. Ideally, these average scores (also called norms) are based on a nationally representative sample or a representative sample of persons who exhibit the condition of interest (e.g., mental health condition). Some instruments also provide scores separately by gender.

Many commercial instruments indicate norming information and subgroup norms on their Web sites and in their manuals. Many instruments offer

## How Gender Can Affect Classification and Diagnosis

Applying instruments to girls that were developed and tested with general delinquent populations may negatively affect the instrument's performance, even if the study samples on which the test was conducted included girls. General delinquent populations typically include a large number of boys. When instruments developed in these populations are used with girls, several concerns arise:

- An instrument may not accurately identify negative behaviors (e.g., offending) if the instrument does not account for the small number of girls who might exhibit the behavior.
- An instrument may misclassify problematic behaviors (e.g., if girls are clustered into one category, such as low risk, an instrument may not adequately identify high-risk girls because they appear to be at low risk compared with boys).
- An instrument may not distinguish subgroups (e.g., it may not distinguish girls at high and low risk).
- An instrument may not identify or may misidentify the needs and strengths of girls because it does not contain items that are particularly relevant to girls (e.g., girls may be strengthened by family or social support networks).

separate norms by gender, but gender norms are not always necessary—analysis sometimes indicates no need for them. Past research and instrument reviews also often provide helpful information about gender norming for a specific instrument.

Researchers who develop risk assessment instruments do not usually use the term norming but instead reference instrument validation. In this context, validation describes how well the items or total scores predict risk.<sup>5</sup> For risk assessment instruments, validation usually involves determining item weights and total scores in a “construction sample.” These weights and scores are later confirmed in a second “validation sample.” An instrument has been validated by gender when research shows that it can predict risk equally for boys and girls.

Gender-based development can also involve the creation of gender-specific scoring systems under which the specific items or questions on the instrument are scored differently for girls and boys (as opposed to gender-based norms, which involve different interpretations of the total score).

Another aspect of gender-based development involves the creation of gender-specific items or, in some cases, completely separate versions of the instrument for girls and boys.

**Gender-based analysis.** As with gender-based development, gender-based analyses conducted in subsequent research can provide helpful indications of how well an instrument works for girls. Indicators of gender-based performance include studies of instrument psychometrics, such as validity (i.e., whether the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure) and reliability (i.e., whether

the instrument is stable over time or across different raters). Factors such as validity and reliability should be consistent across gender. Additionally, if subsequent research reveals that an instrument shows expected gender differences (e.g., gender differences the instrument reveals are consistent with existing literature), it can be used to confirm the appropriateness of an instrument for girls.

In the absence of research that indicates how well instruments perform by gender, practitioners cannot know whether such instruments accurately assess risks and needs for girls. Practitioners concerned about such issues need a resource that examines gender-based performance across a wide variety of instruments so that they can make better informed decisions about which instruments to use with their populations. This Bulletin can serve as a basic resource for practitioners seeking information on gender-based performance of risk assessment and treatment instruments for delinquent girls. For more information about each instrument reviewed, see <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/programs/girlsdelinquency.html>.

### Instrument Review Process

To assess whether risk assessment and treatment-focused instruments that are gender-responsive exist for delinquent girls, the authors conducted a comprehensive examination of relevant instruments. The examination had two primary phases: a preliminary search for instruments and an intensive examination of instruments that met the inclusion criteria.

The authors conducted the initial literature searches between May 2006 and February 2007. To ensure consistency of information across instruments and verify previously collected

information, the authors conducted a comprehensive quality check and Web search for all instruments in January and February 2008. The findings presented here reflect the information the authors located on each instrument during the given timeframes.

The authors primarily examined instruments explicitly intended for use with youth involved in the justice system as well as instruments that address issues that these youth frequently face (e.g., suicide risk) regardless of whether the instruments were specifically developed for this population. Thus, instruments developed with community-based samples, but not necessarily intended for youth in the juvenile justice system, were also included.<sup>6</sup> Although the primary audience of this Bulletin is juvenile justice practitioners, the review may also be useful to any practitioner implementing a community-based delinquency prevention program.

The authors limited their review to instruments in the following four categories (the last three of which are treatment-focused instruments):

- Risk and risk/needs assessment instruments.
- Global needs assessment instruments.
- Substance abuse instruments.
- Mental health instruments.

The authors identified instruments through literature and Web searches and reference books. Books the authors consulted included *Assessing the Youthful Offender: Issues and Techniques* (Hoge and Andrews, 1996) and *Mental Health Screening and Assessment in Juvenile Justice* (Grisso, Vincent, and Seagrave, 2005).

The authors also solicited practitioner input through three sources. First, the authors capitalized on knowledge generated from a related GSG project—a review of programs for girls—and included instruments that program directors of female-targeted programs identified. Second, the authors included assessment instruments that local program directors serving juveniles under the Federal Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative reported. Finally, the authors included submissions

received from practitioners through the GSG Web site.

The preliminary search yielded an initial set of 327 instruments. Before conducting the intensive examination, 184 instruments were removed from the initial set, for a final total of 143 instruments. Reasons for exclusion included the following:

- Outdated or duplicate instruments ( $n = 14$ ). This set included instruments replaced by later versions, subscales of existing instruments, and those that measured against outdated criteria (e.g., the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition* [DSM-III] instead of the DSM-IV).
- Inappropriate instruments ( $n = 33$ ). This set included instruments intended for use with boys or adults, those exclusively used and tested on non-U.S. populations, and those used solely for research or prevalence studies (e.g., surveys).
- Instruments outside the project's scope ( $n = 92$ ). This set included instruments too broadly focused for common use with justice-involved youth (i.e., they did not fall into one of the four major categories: risk assessment, global needs assessment, substance use, or mental health).
- Instruments that could not be verified ( $n = 45$ ). This set included instruments for which the authors could not locate sufficient detail to either confirm the instrument's existence or conduct the examination.<sup>7</sup>

The authors cataloged information about each instrument in a spreadsheet. Sources of information included Web sites and documentation from instrument developers, existing



### An Online Search Tool

The Girls Study Group created an online instrument search tool that allows researchers and practitioners to find the instrument that best meets their needs. The online site also contains information about the study and a link to an alphabetical list of all instruments reviewed. Go to: <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/programs/girlsdelinquency.html>.

instrument reviews (e.g., the *Mental Measurements Yearbook* and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism's *Guide to Assessing Alcohol Problems*), and literature searches (including article abstracts and full-text articles).

The authors considered an instrument to have favorable gender-based performance if it met at least one of the following criteria:

- **Gender-based development**—The instrument offers gender-specific norms or scoring, has gender-specific versions, or includes gender-specific items.
- **Favorable gender-based analysis**—Analysis indicated that the instrument's validity or reliability did

not differ by gender, that its scores were not correlated with gender, or that gender differences the instrument revealed were consistent with the literature (e.g., girls scored higher on mental health issues and boys on physical aggression).

For each instrument, the authors developed the following categories for findings:

- **Favorable**—The instrument had positive gender-based performance information.
- **Unclear**—The instrument had mixed or inconsistent gender-based performance information.
- **Unfavorable**—The instrument had negative gender-based performance information.
- **Unknown**—The instrument lacked gender information.

The authors further subdivided favorable instruments as follows:

- Instruments that met both criteria (gender-based development and

favorable gender-based analysis). For example, an instrument that offers gender-specific norms and is equally reliable for girls and boys would be considered more promising than an instrument that met only one of the two criteria.

- Instruments that met only one criterion (gender-based development or favorable gender-based analysis):
  - **Favorable gender-based analysis only.** The second-most promising type of instrument is one for which the authors found evidence of favorable gender-based analyses.
  - **Gender-based development only.** This type is the least promising of the three because it offers gender-based development without subsequent research to confirm the gender-appropriateness of the instrument's performance.



Practitioners attempting to choose between instruments can use this Bulletin and the companion Web tool as key resources. However, the reader should not consider these findings recommendations for which instruments should or should not be put into practice with girls. Such a recommendation would involve a number of considerations that go beyond gender (such considerations are discussed in detail in “Recommendations for Practitioners,” page 19). An instrument may show favorable gender performance but be considered inappropriate for other reasons (e.g., because the full norming sample is not representative or because it is not reliable or valid). Conversely, an instrument with unknown gender performance information may work perfectly well for girls, but the authors might not have located evidence that it works appropriately.

## Results

The authors examined 143 instruments, with the following results:

- Favorable—73 instruments.
- Unclear—7 instruments.
- Unfavorable—8 instruments.
- Unknown—55 instruments.

This Bulletin focuses on the 73 instruments with favorable gender performance. The instruments are grouped and discussed by their primary purpose:<sup>8</sup> risk and risk/needs assessment, global needs assessment, substance abuse assessment, and mental health assessment.

The summary tables in each section include the following information:

- Instrument name and acronym (the instrument name often also indicates revisions or version

information) and a citation for the original source reference, where available.

- Brief summary of what the instrument measures.
- Population and/or age range.
- Availability—whether the instrument is commercially available or in the public domain or its availability is unknown.
- Whether the instrument was developed for use with juvenile justice populations or has been used in research involving juvenile justice populations.
- Information on gender-based performance—whether the instrument met both criteria (gender-based development and favorable gender-based analysis) or one criterion (either gender-based development or favorable gender-based analysis) and a summary of gender-based performance information located by the authors.

## Risk and Risk/Needs Assessment Instruments

Justice system practitioners use risk assessment instruments to assess the probability of some future outcome of concern. Such instruments usually assess the likelihood of recidivism but can also examine the likelihood of probation revocation or institutional misbehavior. By estimating such probabilities, these instruments help practitioners make decisions about placement, security classification levels, and the timing of release. This category also includes combination “risk/needs assessment” instruments, which examine risk factors and treatment needs to determine a person’s risk level. The higher score—from either the risk assessment portion or

the needs assessment portion of the instrument—determines the level of risk.<sup>9</sup>

This category includes instruments designed exclusively for assessing justice-involved or at-risk youth. It includes general instruments developed for use across various jurisdictions and instruments created for a specific jurisdiction.

The authors reviewed a total of 35 risk assessment instruments and found 11 with favorable gender-based performance (see table 1 on page 8). Three instruments had an unfavorable gender-based analysis, and 21 instruments had unknown gender-based performance information.

The first five instruments listed in table 1 have gender-based development (i.e., female-specific instruments, items, or norms/validation) and subsequent favorable gender-based analysis. The other six risk or risk/needs assessments were developed for use in a specific jurisdiction; four of these have favorable gender-based analyses and the other two have been specifically validated for use with girls. The single-jurisdiction instruments may serve as promising models for other communities but must be locally validated to ensure that they appropriately assess risk, taking local policies and characteristics into consideration (see “Recommendations for Practitioners” on page 19).<sup>10</sup>

## Global Needs Assessment Instruments

Needs assessment instruments provide a broad-based assessment of youths’ problem areas requiring further followup. Many States and jurisdictions use a separate needs assessment instrument as a

**Table 1.** Risk and Risk/Needs Assessment Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Performance

Instrument	What the Instrument Measures	Population (Age Range)	Availability	Gender-Based Performance
<b>Developed for Use Across Various Jurisdictions</b>				
Instruments With Both Gender-Based Development and Favorable Gender-Based Analysis				
<b>Early Assessment Risk List for Girls (EARL-21G)</b> (Augimeri, 2001)	Risk of future antisocial behavior	Delinquent girls (younger than 12)	Commercially available	Developed and tested exclusively with girls; reliability and validity established
<b>Global Risk Assessment Device (GRAD)</b> (Gavazzi et al., 2003)	Risk of delinquency and need for treatment services	At-risk youth in juvenile justice settings (11–17)	Commercially available	Includes gender-specific items; favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Risk-Sophistication-Treatment Inventory (RSTI)</b> (Salekin, 2004)	Risk of danger to others, level of maturity, amenability to treatment	Juvenile justice-involved youth (9–18)	Commercially available	Separate norms available by gender; favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Youth Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (Y-COMPAS)</b> (Brennan, 2004)	Risk of delinquency	Arrested delinquents	Commercially available	Separate norms available by gender; favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI)</b> (Hoge, Andrews, and Leschied, 2002)	Risk of recidivism and institutional misconduct	Juvenile offenders (12–18)	Commercially available	Validated for use with girls; favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Developed for Specific Jurisdictions</b>				
Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Analysis				
<b>Detention Risk Assessment Instrument (DRAI)</b>	Risk of recidivism and future detention (used to determine need for detention)	Juvenile offenders in Florida (younger than 18)	Unknown	Favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Delinquency Risk Assessment (DRA)</b>	Risk of future criminal behavior	Juvenile offenders in Mississippi (younger than 18)	In public domain	Favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Missouri Juvenile Risk Assessment Scale</b>	Risk of recidivism	Juvenile offenders in Missouri (younger than 16)	In public domain	Favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Risk Factor Profile</b>	Risk of serious and violent delinquency	Children who show early signs of serious problem behavior, including delinquency, in Ramsey County, Minnesota (younger than 10)	Unknown	Favorable gender-based analysis found
Instruments With Gender-Based Development				
<b>Alameda County Placement Risk Assessment</b> (Jones and Baird, 2001)	Risk of recidivism	Juvenile probationers in Alameda County, California	Unknown	Validated for use with girls
<b>San Diego Risk and Resiliency Checkup (SDRRRC)</b> (Turner, Fain, and Sehgal, 2005)	Risk of recidivism	Delinquent youth in San Diego County, California	Unknown	Validated for use with girls

Note: All instruments were either developed for use with juvenile justice populations or have been used in research involving juvenile justice populations.



companion to their risk assessment instruments. Some commercially available global needs assessment instruments also exist.

The authors reviewed six instruments in this category, and two met the criteria for determining favorable gender performance (see table 2 below). Among the two favorable instruments, one has both gender-specific items and favorable gender-based analysis. The other instrument has favorable gender-based analysis but is not normed by gender. For the remaining four instruments, the authors could not locate gender information.<sup>11</sup>

**Substance Abuse Instruments**

This category of instruments includes tools intended to detect alcohol or substance use, including the presence or severity of abuse, dependence, and problems associated with abuse. Some instruments include mental health indicators and can also be used to detect co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders.

Substance abuse instruments are appropriate for use with both at-risk and justice-involved youth. They can

be administered at multiple points in time, including during initial intake and when needed to determine treatment progress for abusers.

The authors reviewed 22 instruments in this category; they found 7 that had favorable gender performance (as summarized in table 3 on page 10). Among these favorable instruments, one met both criteria (offers norms by gender and has favorable gender-based analysis); three have only favorable gender-based analysis; and three are normed by gender, but the authors found no favorable gender-based analysis. Four substance abuse instruments had unclear or mixed gender analysis results and one showed unfavorable gender results. For the remaining 10 instruments, results were unknown or the authors could not locate sufficient information to determine gender performance.

**Mental Health Instruments**

The final category of instruments covers a broad scope of topics within the mental health area, from disorders to positive functioning and adaptive behaviors. The authors

reviewed 80 mental health instruments and subdivided them into 7 topical subcategories, each of which is discussed below.

**Psychopathy, antisocial behavior, aggression, and anger instruments.**

The instruments in this subcategory examine antisocial or violent behavior in children and adolescents. They are sometimes used in conjunction with risk assessment instruments to determine risk of future violence.

The authors reviewed 10 instruments in this category.<sup>12</sup> Five instruments showed favorable gender performance; these are summarized in table 4 (on page 11). Two of the instruments listed in table 4 offer gender-based development as well as favorable gender-based analysis. The other three instruments met just one of the criteria (one instrument has favorable gender-based analysis and the other two provide norms separately by gender). Of the remaining five instruments in this category, one had unclear gender information, one showed unfavorable gender analysis, and three had insufficient information available to determine gender performance.

**Table 2.** Global Needs Assessment Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Performance

Instrument	What the Instrument Measures	Population (Age Range)	Availability	Gender-Based Performance
Instruments With Both Gender-Based Development and Favorable Gender-Based Analysis				
<b>Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument—Version 2 (MAYSI-2)</b> (Grisso and Barnum, 2006)	Mental health and substance use needs	Juvenile justice-involved youth (12–17)	Commercially available	Separate versions of the instrument are available by gender; favorable gender-based analysis found
Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Analysis				
<b>Problem Oriented Screening Instrument for Teenagers (POSIT)</b> (Rahdert, 1991)	Problems and treatment needs in 10 areas (e.g., physical/mental health, relationships, education/vocational status, substance use)	Adolescents (12–19)	In public domain	Favorable gender-based analysis found

Note: All instruments were either developed for use with juvenile justice populations or have been used in research involving juvenile justice populations.

**Table 3.** Substance Abuse Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Performance

Instrument	What the Instrument Measures	Population Age Range)	Availability	Used or Researched With Juvenile Justice Populations	Gender-Based Performance
Instruments With Both Gender-Based Development and Favorable Gender-Based Analysis					
<b>Personal Experience Screening Questionnaire (PESQ)</b> (Winters, 1992)	Substance abuse	Adolescents (12–18)	Commercially available	Yes	Separate norms available by gender; favorable gender-based analysis found
Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Analysis					
<b>Adolescent Substance Battery (ASB)</b> (James and Moore, 1994)	Drug impairment and defensiveness	Adolescents	Unknown	—	Favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>CRAFFT</b> (Knight et al., 1999)	Alcohol and other drug use	Adolescents (14–18)	In public domain	—	Favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory for Adolescents—Second Version (SASSI-A2)</b> (Miller, 1999)	Substance dependence and substance abuse	Adolescents (12–18)	Commercially available	Yes	Favorable gender-based analysis found
Instruments With Gender-Based Development					
<b>Adolescent Chemical Dependency Inventory—Corrections Version II (ACDI-CV II)</b>	Risk of violence; substance abuse; adjustment, emotional, and mental health problems	Juvenile offenders (12–17)	Commercially available	Yes	Separate norms available by gender
<b>Comprehensive Addiction Severity Index for Adolescents (CASI-A)</b> (Meyers et al., 1995)	Drug and alcohol use/addiction and psychosocial severity	Adolescents (12–18)	Commercially available	Yes	Separate norms available by gender
<b>Juvenile Automated Substance Abuse Evaluation (JASAE)</b> (Ellis, 1987)	Alcohol and drug use/abuse and problems with attitude and life stress	Adolescents (12–18)	Commercially available	Yes	Separate norms available by gender

Note: “—” means that information about whether the instrument has been used or researched with juvenile justice populations could not be found.



**Table 4.** Psychopathy, Antisocial Behavior, Aggression, and Anger Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Performance

Instrument	What the Instrument Measures	Population (Age Range)	Availability	Gender-Based Performance
Instruments With Both Gender-Based Development and Favorable Gender-Based Analysis				
<b>Antisocial Process Screening Device (APSD)</b> (Frick and Hare, 2001)	Psychopathy and Antisocial Personality Disorder	Children and adolescents (6–13)	Commercially available	Separate norms available by gender; favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Hare Psychopathy Checklist–Youth Version (PCL–YV)</b> (Forth, Kosson, and Hare, 2003)	Psychopathy	Adolescents in clinical and juvenile justice settings (12–18)	Commercially available	Validated for use with girls; favorable gender-based analysis found
Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Analysis				
<b>Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory (YPI)</b> (Andershed et al., 2002)	Psychopathy	Adolescents (12–18)	Unknown	Favorable gender-based analysis found
Instruments With Gender-Based Development				
<b>Jesness Inventory–Revised (JI–R)</b> (Jesness, 2003)	Conduct Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder	Children, adolescents, and adults (8 and older)	Commercially available	Separate norms available by gender
<b>State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory–2 (STAXI–2)</b> (Spielberger, 1999)	Anger	Adolescents and adults (16 and older)	Commercially available	Separate norms available by gender

Note: All instruments were either developed for use with juvenile justice populations or have been used in research involving juvenile justice populations.

**Abuse or trauma instruments.**

Instruments in this domain assess the presence of victimization or personal trauma, including measures of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The authors reviewed a total of four instruments, of which three had favorable gender performance (see table 5 on page 12). One of these instruments has favorable gender-based analysis but does not have separate gender norms (although the instrument has norms available). The other two instruments are normed by gender with no indication of additional gender-based analyses. For the fourth instrument in this category, no information was available to make a determination regarding gender.

**Depression and suicide risk instruments.** Instruments in this subcategory primarily measure depression, but also measure risk for suicide. Suicide risk may be especially relevant to

initial intake in detention and correctional settings.

The authors reviewed eight instruments in this category and found six with favorable gender performance; these are summarized in table 6 (see page 12). Two of the instruments have both gender-specific norms and favorable gender-based analysis, and four instruments have favorable gender-based analysis but not gender-based development. The other two instruments in this category were classified as unknown because no relevant gender analyses could be found.

**Behavior rating instruments.** Instruments in this subcategory generally use parent or teacher reports or ratings of child and adolescent behavior and are often characterized as checklists or rating scales. Because of the source of information (i.e., parents and teachers), these instruments are nearly always used in community

settings and may not be feasible or expedient to use in detention facilities.

The authors examined 19 instruments in this subcategory, and 14 exhibited favorable gender performance (see table 7 on pages 13 and 14). Five instruments have both gender-based development and favorable gender-based analysis, two instruments have favorable gender analysis without gender-based development, and seven instruments offer gender-specific norms or scoring systems without gender-based analyses. Of the five remaining instruments, two had unfavorable gender analyses, and the authors classified three as unknown because they lacked relevant gender information.

**Self-concept and self-esteem instruments.**<sup>13</sup> These instruments measure youth’s self-concept (i.e., the mental image youth have of themselves, including their strengths,

**Table 5.** Abuse or Trauma Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Performance

Instrument	What the Instrument Measures	Population (Age Range)	Availability	Gender-Based Performance
Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Analysis				
<b>Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Reaction Index (PTSD-RI)</b> (Steinberg et. al, 2004)	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	Children and adolescents	Unknown	Favorable gender-based analysis found
Instruments With Gender-Based Development				
<b>Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ)</b> (Bernstein and Fink, 1998)	Victimization	Adolescents and adults (12 and older)	Commercially available	Separate norms available by gender
<b>Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children (TSCC)</b> (Briere, 1996)	Post-traumatic stress and related psychological symptomatology	Children who have experienced traumatic events (8–16)	Commercially available	Separate scoring systems available by gender

Note: All instruments were either developed for use with juvenile justice populations or have been used in research involving juvenile justice populations.

**Table 6.** Depression and Suicide Risk Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Performance

Instrument	What the Instrument Measures	Population (Age Range)	Availability	Used or Researched With Juvenile Justice Populations	Gender-Based Performance
Instruments With Both Gender-Based Development and Favorable Gender-Based Analysis					
<b>Children’s Depression Inventory (CDI)</b> (Kovacs, 1985)	Depression	Children and adolescents (6–17)	Commercially available	Yes	Separate norms available by gender; favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale, Second Edition (RADSD-2)</b> (Reynolds, 1988a)	Depression	Adolescents (13–18)	Commercially available	—	Separate norms available by gender; favorable gender-based analysis found
Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Analysis					
<b>Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II)</b> (Beck, Steer, and Brown, 1996)	Depression	Psychiatrically diagnosed adolescents and adults (13 and older)	Commercially available	Yes	Favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Children’s Sadness Management Scale (CSMS)</b> (Zeman, Shipman, and Penza-Clyve, 2001)	Inhibition, dysregulated expression, and coping with sadness	Children (6–12)	Unknown	—	Favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Inventory of Suicide Orientation-30 (ISO-30)</b> (King and Kowalchuk, 1994)	Suicide risk	Adolescents (13–18)	Commercially available	Yes	Favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (SIQ)</b> (Reynolds, 1988b)	Suicide risk	Adolescents (12–18)	Commercially available	Yes	Favorable gender-based analysis found

Note: “—” means that information about whether the instrument has been used or researched with juvenile justice populations could not be found.

**Table 7.** Behavior Rating Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Performance

Instrument	What the Instrument Measures	Population (Age Range)	Availability	Used or Researched With Juvenile Justice Populations	Gender-Based Performance
Instruments With Both Gender-Based Development and Favorable Gender-Based Analysis					
<b>ADHD Rating Scale (ADHD RS-IV)</b> (DuPaul et al., 1998)	Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	Children and adolescents (5–18)	Commercially available	—	Separate scoring systems available by gender; favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Adjustment Scales for Children and Adolescents (ASCA)</b> (McDermott, Marston, and Stott, 1993)	Behavior problems, psychopathology, and positive adjustment	Children and adolescents (5–17)	Unknown	—	Separate norms available by gender; favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Behavior Assessment System for Children, Second Edition (BASC-2)</b> (Reynolds and Kamphaus, 2006)	Behavior and self-perceptions	Children, adolescents, and college students (2 and older)	Commercially available	—	Separate norms available by gender; favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale—Second Edition (BERS-2)</b> (Epstein and Sharma, 1998)	Emotional and behavioral strengths	Children and adolescents (5–18)	Commercially available	Yes	Separate norms available by gender; favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL)</b> (Achenbach, 1991)	Behavioral problems and social competencies	Children and adolescents (18 months–18 years)	Commercially available	Yes	Separate norms available by gender; favorable gender-based analysis found
Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Analysis					
<b>Behavior Dimensions Rating Scale (BDRS)</b> (Bullock and Wilson, 1989)	Behavior problems and emotional or behavioral disorders	Children and adolescents (5 and older)	Commercially available	Yes	Favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Dysregulation Inventory (DI)</b> (Mezzich et al., 2001)	Psychological dysregulation (emotional, behavioral, and cognitive)	Adolescents	Unknown	—	Favorable gender-based analysis found
Instruments With Gender-Based Development					
<b>Attention Deficit Disorders Evaluation Scale (ADDES-3)</b> (McCarney, 1995a, 1995b)	Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and ADHD	Children and adolescents (4–19)	Commercially available	—	Separate norms available by gender
<b>Behavior Evaluation Scale, Third Edition (BES-3)</b> (McCarney and Arthaud, 2005)	Emotional disturbances and behavioral disorders	Children and adolescents (4–19)	Commercially available	—	Separate norms available by gender
<b>Devereux Behavior Rating Scale—School Form (BRSS)</b> (Naglieri, LeBuffe, and Pfeiffer, 1993)	Severe emotional disturbances (brief screening)	Children and adolescents (5–18)	Commercially available	—	Separate norms available by gender
<b>Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with Youngsters (MESSY)</b> (Matson, Rotatori, and Helsel, 1983)	Social skills and problem behaviors	Children and adolescents (4–18)	Commercially available	Yes	Separate norms available by gender

Note: “—” means that information about whether the instrument has been used or researched with juvenile justice populations could not be found.

(table continued on next page)

**Table 7.** Behavior Rating Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Performance (continued)

Instrument	What the Instrument Measures	Population (Age Range)	Availability	Used or Researched With Juvenile Justice Populations	Gender-Based Performance
Instruments With Gender-Based Development (continued)					
<b>Personality Inventory for Children, 2nd Edition (PIC-2)</b> (Lachar and Gruber, 2001)	Behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal adjustment (i.e., coping)	Children and adolescents (5–19)	Commercially available	—	Separate scoring systems available by gender
<b>Revised Behavior Problem Checklist (RBPC)</b> (Quay and Peterson, 1996)	Problem behaviors and behavior disorders	Children and adolescents (5–18)	Commercially available	Yes	Separate norms available by gender
<b>Student Behavior Survey (SBS)</b> (Lachar et al., 2000)	Emotional and behavioral adjustment, academic resources, and social functioning	Children and adolescents (5–18)	Commercially available	—	Separate norms available by gender

Note: “—” means that information about whether the instrument has been used or researched with juvenile justice populations could not be found.

weaknesses, status, etc.) or their level of self-esteem (i.e., self-respect).

The authors reviewed six instruments in this category and found that four had favorable gender performance. Among the four favorable instruments summarized in table 8 (see page 15), one has gender-based development as well as subsequent favorable gender-based analysis, one has favorable gender-based analysis, and two have gender-based development but no additional gender-based analysis. One instrument, though normed by gender, had mixed gender analyses in subsequent studies and was not categorized as favorable. The sixth instrument in this category showed unfavorable gender performance.

**Social-emotional competence and functioning instruments.** This broad mental health subcategory includes instruments that measure day-to-day functioning, temperament, social skills, and social and emotional adjustment (e.g., coping and adaptive behavior).

The authors reviewed 18 instruments, and found nine gender-favorable instruments (see table 9 on page 16).

Among the favorable instruments in this category, one offers both gender-based development and favorable gender-based analysis, three have favorable gender-based analysis without gender-based development, and five offer gender-based development without additional gender-based analysis. Of the remaining nine instruments, one had unclear gender performance and gender information for eight was insufficient.

**Other mental health instruments.** This final subcategory of mental health instruments includes general mental health disorders not already covered in the above subcategories, including DSM-IV disorders. Many of these instruments measure multiple disorders or simultaneously assess clusters of symptoms associated with mental health disorders instead of focusing on a single type of disorder.



**Table 8.** Self-Concept and Self-Esteem Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Performance

Instrument	What the Instrument Measures	Population (Age Range)	Availability	Used or Researched With Juvenile Justice Populations	Gender-Based Performance
Instruments With Both Gender-Based Development and Favorable Gender-Based Analysis					
<b>Multidimensional Self-Concept Scale (MSCS)</b> (Bracken, 1992)	Self-concept and social-emotional functioning	Children and adolescents (9–19)	Commercially available	Yes	Analysis during development showed no need for separate gender norms; favorable gender-based analysis found
Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Analysis					
<b>Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory, 3rd Edition (CFSEI-3)</b> (Battle, 2002)	Self-esteem	Children and adolescents (6–18)	Commercially available	—	Favorable gender-based analysis found
Instruments With Gender-Based Development					
<b>Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, Second Edition (PHCSCS-2)</b> (Piers and Herzberg, 2002)	Self-concept	Children and adolescents (7–18)	Commercially available	Yes	Analysis during development showed no need for separate gender norms
<b>Self-Esteem Index (SEI)</b> (Brown and Alexander, 1991)	Self-esteem	Children and adolescents (7–18)	Commercially available	Yes	Analysis during development showed no need for separate gender norms

Note: “—” means that information about whether the instrument has been used or researched with juvenile justice populations could not be found.

The authors reviewed 15 instruments, of which 12 show favorable gender performance. Two of the favorable instruments listed in table 10 (on page 17) indicate both gender-based development and favorable gender-based analysis. For five instruments, the authors found favorable gender analysis but no indication of gender-specific norms; five instruments offer separate norms by gender, but additional gender-based analyses were not located. The remaining three instruments in this category were classified as unknown because no research demonstrating gender performance was available.

### Discussion of Findings

Across all instrument types, findings regarding gender performance are encouraging (see table 11 on page 18).

More than half (73) of the 143 instruments reviewed showed favorable gender-based analysis or provided gender-based development—the authors found favorable gender-based analysis for 25 instruments; 28 had gender-based development but no additional gender-based analysis; and 20 instruments met both criteria.

Of the four categories of instruments reviewed, the mental health instruments are most sensitive to gender concerns. Results for the risk assessment instruments were the least encouraging. Out of the 35 instruments reviewed, only 5 gender-appropriate instruments were developed for multiple jurisdictions. Although several jurisdiction-specific instruments showed favorable gender performance, the work and resources required to validate these instruments for use in other jurisdictions could be significant.

The other jurisdiction-specific risk assessment instruments are problematic either because their developers have not analyzed validity (i.e., the extent to which the instrument accurately predicts the intended outcome) separately by gender or because researchers have found that the instrument is less valid when used for girls. These findings are especially worrisome because the consequences of misclassification for girls can be serious—both for the girls themselves (if their risk is overestimated) and potentially for public safety (if their risk is underestimated).

### Commercially Available Instruments and Cost Considerations

Many of the gender-appropriate instruments identified in this review have been published commercially.

**Table 9.** Social-Emotional Competence and Functioning Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Performance

Instrument	What the Instrument Measures	Population (Age Range)	Availability	Used or Researched With Juvenile Justice Populations	Gender-Based Performance
Instruments With Both Gender-Based Development and Favorable Gender-Based Analysis					
<b>Problem Inventory for Adolescent Girls (PIAG)</b> (Gaffney and McFall, 1981)	Conduct problems and social skills	Adolescent girls (8th–11th grade)	No cost but permission to use required	Yes	Developed and tested exclusively with girls; validity established
Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Analysis					
<b>Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS)</b> (Hodges, 1994)	Impairment in day-to-day functioning due to emotional, behavioral, psychological, psychiatric, or substance use problems	Children and adolescents (6–17)	Commercially available	Yes	Favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Children’s Global Assessment Scale (CGAS)</b> (Shaffer, Gould, and Brasic, 1983)	Level of functioning at home, at school, and with peers	Children and adolescents (4–16)	In public domain	Yes	Favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Columbia Impairment Scale (CIS)</b> (Bird, Shaffer, and Fisher, 1993)	Impairment and functioning in 4 areas: interpersonal relations, psychopathology, job/schoolwork, and leisure time	Children and adolescents (9–17)	Unknown	Yes	Favorable gender-based analysis found
Instruments With Gender-Based Development					
<b>Adaptive Behavior Evaluation Scale, Revised Second Edition (ABES–R2)</b> (McCarney and Arthaud, 2006)	Adaptive skills	Children and adolescents with impairments (13–19)	Commercially available	—	Separate norms available by gender
<b>Personality Inventory for Youth (PIY)</b> (Lacher and Gruber, 1995)	Emotional and behavioral adjustment, family interaction, and neurocognitive and attention-related academic functioning	Children and adolescents (9–19)	Commercially available	Yes	Separate norms and scoring systems available by gender
<b>Personality Research Form–E (PRF–E)</b> (Jackson, 1997)	Normal personality	Adolescents and adults (13 and older)	Commercially available	Yes	Separate scoring systems available by gender
<b>Scales of Independent Behavior—Revised (SIB–R)</b> (Bruininks et al., 1996)	Adaptive behavior and problem behavior	Infants, children, adolescents, and adults (all ages)	Commercially available	—	Analysis during development showed no need for separate gender norms
<b>Weinberger Adjustment Inventory (WAI)</b> (Weinberger et al., 1987, 1989)	Self-restraint and overall adjustment	Adolescents (10–17)	No cost but permission to use required	—	Analysis during development showed no need for separate gender norms

Note: “—” means that information about whether the instrument has been used or researched with juvenile justice populations could not be found.



**Table 10.** Other Mental Health Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Performance

Instrument	What the Instrument Measures	Population (Age Range)	Availability	Used or Researched With Juvenile Justice Populations	Gender-Based Performance
Instruments With Both Gender-Based Development and Favorable Gender-Based Analysis					
<b>Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS)</b> (Reynolds and Richmond, 1978)	Childhood anxiety	Children and adolescents (6–19)	Commercially available	Yes	Separate norms available by gender; favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Symptom Checklist-90–Revised (SCL-90–R)</b> (Derogatis, 1994)	Psychological problems and symptoms of psychopathology	Adolescents and adults (13 and older)	Commercially available	—	Separate norms available by gender; favorable gender-based analysis found
Instruments With Favorable Gender-Based Analysis					
<b>Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Assessment (CAPA)</b> (Angold and Costello, 2000)	Psychiatric and substance abuse disorders	Children and adolescents (9–18)	No cost but permission to use required	Yes	Favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Diagnostic Interview for Children and Adolescents IV (DICA–IV)</b> (Reich, Welner, and Herjanic, 1997)	Psychiatric disorders	Children and adolescents (6–17)	Commercially available	Yes	Favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children (DISC–IV)</b> (Shaffer et al., 2000)	Common mental disorders	Children and adolescents (6–17)	Commercially available	Yes	Favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ)</b> (Eysenck, Eysenck, and Barrett, 1985)	Extraversion, psychoticism, neuroticism, and lying	Adolescents and adults	Commercially available	Yes	Favorable gender-based analysis found
<b>Patient Health Questionnaire for Adolescents (PHQ–A)</b> (Spitzer and Johnson, 1995)	Anxiety, eating, mood, and substance use disorders	Adolescents	Unknown	Yes	Favorable gender-based analysis found
Instruments With Gender-Based Development					
<b>Adolescent Psychopathology Scale (APS)</b> (Reynolds, 1998)	Psychopathology, clinical and personality disorders	Adolescents (12–19)	Commercially available	Yes	Separate norms available by gender
<b>Basic Personality Inventory (BPI)</b> (Jackson, 1988)	Sources of maladjustment and personal strengths; psychopathology	Adolescents and adults (12 and older)	Commercially available	Yes	Separate norms available by gender
<b>Devereux Scales of Mental Disorders (DSMD)</b> (Naglieri, LeBuffe, and Pfeiffer, 1994)	Psychopathology	Children and adolescents (5–18)	Commercially available	Yes	Separate norms available by gender
<b>Millon Adolescent Clinical Inventory (MACI)</b> (Millon, 1993)	Personality styles, significant problems or concerns, and clinical symptoms	Adolescents in clinical and juvenile justice settings (13–19)	Commercially available	Yes	Separate norms available by gender
<b>Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory–Adolescent (MMPI–A)</b> (Butcher et al., 1992)	Psychopathology	Adolescents (14–18)	Commercially available	Yes	Separate norms available by gender

Note: “—” means that information about whether the instrument has been used or researched with juvenile justice populations could not be found.

**Table 11.** Summary of Gender-Based Findings Across All Instrument Types

Instrument Category	Number of Instruments	Gender-Based Performance			
		Favorable	Unclear	Unfavorable	Unknown
<b>All Instruments</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Risk Assessment Instruments</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Needs Assessment Instruments</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Substance Abuse Instruments</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Mental Health Instruments</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>20</b>
Psychopathy, Antisocial Behavior, Aggression, and Anger	10	5	1	1	3
Abuse or Trauma	4	3	0	0	1
Depression and Suicide Risk	8	6	0	0	2
Behavior Rating	19	14	0	2	3
Self-Concept and Self-Esteem	6	4	1	1	0
Social-Emotional Competence and Functioning	18	9	1	0	8
Other Mental Health	15	12	0	0	3



## Strength-Based Instruments

Juvenile justice practitioners and policymakers are showing increasing interest in “strength-based” instruments that emerged from the drug prevention movement of the 1960s and were supported by the positive psychology movement in the 1990s. These instruments measure both negative and positive influences on a youth’s behavior by including protective factors to assess the level of risk for delinquent behavior. This approach represents a paradigm shift from a medical model focusing on problem assessment and remediation to a model stressing the development of assets.

Strength-based instruments can create a well-balanced assessment by expanding, strengthening, and improving the juvenile justice system’s capacity to include the positive factors that affect a youth and the youth’s family, peers, and community—in addition to accounting for risk factors. These types of instruments hold great promise for assessing girls’ risk for delinquency, but their gender performance has not generally been examined.

Of the 73 instruments with favorable gender information, many measure protective or positive factors, but only 4 are intentionally strength-based: the Youth Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (see table 1), the San Diego Risk and Resiliency Checkup (see table 1, this instrument is jurisdiction-specific), the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale—Second Edition (see table 7), and the Personality Research Form—E (see table 9). These four instruments are either explicitly characterized as strength-based or use descriptive language that reflects strength-based philosophies (e.g., referring to protective factors or making a point of measuring positive youth development rather than disordered behavior).



These instruments come with certain benefits, including that they—

- Typically have extensive research behind them.
- Frequently allow for the possibility of developing jurisdiction- and population-specific scores.
- Often allow for computerization of individual scoring.
- May provide for staff training.

Practitioners must weigh the benefits of using commercially available instruments against the sometimes considerable costs. Expenses can include the original purchase, administration costs for each individual assessed, and the cost of training staff or contracting with trained professionals to administer the instrument.

Using an instrument in the public domain (i.e., a “free” instrument) may also come with some costs. Costs may be associated with local validation should a jurisdiction choose

to implement an instrument in the public domain for which gender performance is unknown. When deciding whether to invest in a commercial instrument or use a free instrument, practitioners will need to assess a wide variety of cost considerations and weigh these expenses against the consequences of not considering gender performance at all.

## Recommendations for Practitioners

Practitioners who want to assess girls’ risks and treatment needs accurately face considerable barriers and unknowns. This Bulletin provides information about many instruments and whether they evaluate girls appropriately. Many instruments are available, however, and literature on the subject is expansive and ever-growing. Local juvenile justice systems and community prevention programs should consider the following issues when selecting and administering instruments:

## Selecting Appropriate Risk and Needs Assessment Instruments

When selecting an instrument, ask the following questions:

- What do we want to accomplish? What are the decisions we want to make? Do we want to do an initial screening or an assessment? Are we trying to find an instrument to do an initial screening to decide who might need further assessment or are we doing an assessment to determine who needs treatment or followup care?
- Are we interested in assessing a single factor or a host of factors? Are we interested in screening for either substance abuse or suicide risk or for multiple mental health risks, such as psychosocial functioning across a variety of contexts?
- Who do we want to assess—every child referred or a certain subgroup? Are we going to administer this instrument to every referred child or just those who meet certain criteria or are flagged by a screening tool?
- What will be the source of the information—information in the case file or a personal interview? If an interview, with whom? How accessible are the parties being interviewed, particularly if we are not interviewing the youth who is central to the case?
- Will it be easy to fold the interview protocol into the ongoing system processing? How hard will it be to actually integrate the instrument into ongoing policies and procedures?
- Who will administer the instrument? Will administration involve many staff within the system? Will it involve general intake staff, case supervision staff, or specialists? What kinds of special training will these staff need? Will administration be contracted outside to a special vendor?
- Has the instrument we are considering actually been used in a juvenile justice population? Has it been used on girls?
- How well does the instrument work for various racial and ethnic populations? Is the instrument culturally appropriate for the types of clients we serve?
- Has the instrument been normed or validated? If so, on what population? Was the sample representative?
- Has the instrument been shown to be reliable and valid? In other places that have used the instrument, has there been agreement on scoring between staff administering the instrument? Does the instrument provide consistent results when administered multiple times? How difficult is it to determine what the instrument is asking? Does it measure what it is supposed to measure?
- What are the costs of purchasing or using the instrument? Is it in the public domain, or must it be purchased? What are the startup or per-use costs? What are the costs associated with training existing staff or hiring trained staff?

**The instrument's purpose.** When selecting instruments, practitioners must ensure that the instrument's purpose and their own reason for using it match. For example, they should not use a diagnostic-focused instrument to determine risk because these instruments were not developed to determine risk behaviors. Conversely, using a predictive risk assessment tool may not be sufficient to determine appropriate treatment for offending youth. Before making specific decisions about which instruments to select, practitioners may want to organize a planning session with staff who work with juveniles to discuss screening and assessment needs and solicit input on what is working and what is not.

**Gender performance.** Practitioners should check current instruments against the information contained in this Bulletin and consider selecting those with favorable gender-based performance over instruments with unfavorable, mixed, or unknown gender-based performance.

**Cost.** Despite the obvious expenses associated with commercially available instruments, they should not be automatically dismissed, especially because many of the gender-appropriate instruments reported here are not in the public domain. The benefits of purchasing commercially available instruments typically include training for staff and custom norming. Practitioners should weigh such benefits against the internal costs they would incur during instrument development, validation, and training.

**Local validation.** A jurisdiction should not use an instrument developed

in a different jurisdiction without subsequent validation in its own population. Practitioners must locally validate instruments because the statistics used to develop an instrument will fit the given distribution of a sample. Additionally, the specific scores assigned to individual items or questions and the total score will better reflect jurisdiction-specific policies and characteristics if the instrument has been validated in the local population.

Nonetheless, adopting extant instruments is a feasible and practical approach if—

- The instrument was developed through an adequate research process that used appropriate validation techniques when tested in its original jurisdiction.
- The new jurisdiction begins to collect data so that the instrument can be validated with its own population.

## Conclusion

The information contained in this Bulletin is meant to be a useful addition to the resources already available to practitioners, which include online and published instrument reviews. Examining gender issues across a wide variety of instruments has been an initial step in documenting what is known about gender and highlighting what remains unknown. Although the primary audience of this Bulletin is juvenile justice practitioners, researchers and instrument developers interested in effective measurement may also find it useful. Researchers and instrument developers may want to ensure that gender-based information is clearly presented in their research publications, as well as in instrument manuals and Web

sites. This will make it easier for practitioners to determine which instruments work best for girls.

## Endnotes

1. The impetus for this increased focus was the 1992 reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, which required states to provide details regarding their plans for addressing gender bias. This Act, which governs OJJDP's operations, was reauthorized most recently in 2002. The 2002 Act specifies that State plans addressing the use of Title II Formula and Block Grants should include "a plan for providing needed gender-specific services for the prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency." [42 U.S.C. 5633(a)(7)(B)(ii)]
2. In general, the distinction between "sex" and "gender" is that sex is biologically determined as either male or female, whereas gender refers to the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of being male or female. In this Bulletin, we follow the convention of using "girls" when speaking of the specific group of concern, but also use "gender" to refer to the more general concept of male/female identity.
3. OJJDP asked the Girls Study Group to examine risk and needs assessment tools used for delinquency prevention, intervention, or treatment purposes and to determine their applicability for girls in light of the Group's findings. This review focuses on instrument performance as it relates to gender only. A full instrument review could cover a wide variety of topics to determine the potential usefulness of an instrument, including instrument purpose, whether it is a static or change measure, the constructs measured, the demographic and geographic representativeness of the sample used to develop the instrument, psychometrics (how reliable and valid the instrument is), and degree of specificity and sensitivity. A full review would also address more practical information such as reading level, available languages, number of items, time to administer, cost/availability, required training, original and revised publication dates, and version history. Although some of this information is available on the companion Web site, a review of this depth was beyond the scope intended by OJJDP for the GSG.
4. The treatment-focused instruments tend to be normed, whereas the risk assessment instruments tend to be validated.
5. The term "validation" is also used when describing treatment-focused instruments, but serves a different purpose in this case. In general, validation refers to the process of determining whether an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. For treatment-focused instruments, validation determines how well the instrument identifies the needs or conditions it was developed to identify or diagnose. For risk assessment instruments, validation determines how well the instrument predicts risk.
6. Assessing delinquent youth with instruments that were originally intended for general populations may not always be appropriate, and the consequences of doing

so are unknown. However, there may be instances in which an instrument of a specific type is needed, but no instruments of that type have been developed for or tested in juvenile justice populations. In such instances, the benefits of using a standardized instrument developed for another population may outweigh the risks of using an instrument that was not specifically intended for use with juvenile delinquents. This is especially true if the standardized instrument is gender appropriate.

7. These tended to be instruments identified by practitioners and instruments mentioned only by acronym in article abstracts.
8. Several instruments could have been grouped under multiple categories.
9. Although these combination instruments can screen for treatment needs, they primarily determine risk, which is what separates them from the “pure” needs assessments described in the next section.
10. One risk assessment instrument authors examined, the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY) (not listed in table 1), claims it can be used to assess either male or female adolescents, but the developers have not yet analyzed gender differences in the instrument’s items or questions. However, the instrument’s manual notes items or questions where general research indicates that a particular risk factor may operate differently for males and females.
11. One additional instrument in the needs assessment category, the

Global Appraisal of Individual Needs (GAIN) (not shown in table 2), reported that gender-based norms were being developed. These norms were not available at the time of the review.

12. Some instruments in this category were excluded because they are intended for use only with boys.
13. Although self-concept and self-esteem have not generally been shown to be risk factors for delinquency, these qualities may serve as protective factors for delinquency. This area was included in the review because it is a commonly studied mental health area.

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