



# Content Analysis of *Community Solutions Incorporated* Alternative-in-the-Community Programs



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## Abstract

Although there is extensive research regarding the treatment of male offenders, there is growing literature on the treatment of female offenders, which focuses on gender-responsive treatment programs. This growing literature, however, lacks research regarding gender-responsivity in community-based alternatives to incarceration. The current study is a content analysis of two manuals: the female-only *Moving On* program and the male-only *Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R)* program, seeking to identify the similarities and differences between the programs. The results of this study align with the theoretical research on gender-responsive treatment programs. Similarities include the utilization of motivational interviewing, challenging harmful self-talk, and developing pro-social relationships. There are also several key differences: *Moving On* uses relational theory, motivational interviewing, and cognitive-behavioral intervention, whereas *R&R* uses the SARA Model, differences in delivery style and length, as well as the presence of an aftercare program for *Moving On*. Future studies should seek to address whether or not gender-responsive programs can be implemented to men and women who are currently incarcerated.

## Introduction

There are an increasing number of women in the United States who are under correctional supervision. Research shows that women offenders enter into the criminal justice system at different times and in different ways when compared to their male counterparts (Covington & Bloom, 2006). Historically, there has not been a widespread need to provide gender-responsive programming for women. This is due to the fact that women accounted for only a small percentage of arrests. Research also found that women were generally committing less serious offenses than men. However, women have been entering the criminal justice system at increasing rates since the 1970's (Gehring, Van Voorhis, & Bell, 2010). During this same time period, there has been a shift in focus from incarceration toward community corrections; therefore there is an increased need for community-based alternatives to incarceration. In order to design effective community-based alternatives for women, there needs to be an increased sensitivity toward women's needs (Covington & Bloom, 2006). Gender-responsive programs are based on the fact that women have unique risk factors and needs in order to properly reintegrate them into the community and prevent recidivism (Gehring et al., 2010). Women offenders face different challenges than male offenders, primarily, sexual abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence and poverty (Covington & Bloom, 2006). Gender-responsive risk factors for women include dysfunctional relationships, family conflict, parental stress, child abuse and adult victimization, and mental health issues. These risk factors predict recidivism as well as institutional misconduct (Gehring et al., 2010). There are several treatment approaches that prove effective among the population of female offenders.

## Methods

This study is a content analysis of Community Solutions Incorporated (CSI) Alternative in the Community (AIC) Programs. The treatment manuals for both the female-only *Moving On* program and the male-only *R&R* program were obtained from the area director for CSI in Connecticut. CSI is a non-profit organization promotes self-reliance, responsibility and accountability for at-risk and disadvantaged youth and adults. The AIC programs are community-based alternatives to incarceration that provide multifaceted intervention services for offenders awaiting trial, or who are on probation or parole.

- *Moving On* has a total of 22 sessions and over 44 hours of content with approximately two hours allotted per session. There are six modules, with Module 1 and Module 6 being 1:1 and based in motivational interviewing, while modules 2-5 are based in a group setting. *Moving On* uses a continuous intake method where new participants can be added after the completion of every module. Therefore the program itself does not have to be completed in any specific order.
- *R&R* has a total of 14 sessions with an initial intake interview that is based in motivational interviewing. Participants meet two times a week for 7 weeks in order to complete the program. Sessions focus on building cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills through the SARA model of problem solving. *R&R* does not have continuous intake and must be completed in order as sessions build upon each other.

The current study is a content analysis of two manuals, the female-only *Moving On* program and the male-only *R&R* program, seeking to identify the similarities and differences in themes and background theories that were present in both manuals.

## Results

### Similarities

- *Moving On* and *R&R*:
  - have intake sessions that utilize motivational interviewing techniques in order to ascertain the offender's risk level and treatment needs.
  - contain sessions dedicated to challenging harmful self-talk, as well as improving overall self-efficacy.
  - focus on developing supportive and pro-social relationships
  - contain sessions on conflict-management

### Differences

- Background theory: *Moving On* uses relational theory, motivational interviewing, and cognitive-behavioral intervention to teach women how to make pro-social connections in their community. *R&R* is mainly rooted in the SARA Model.
- Delivery style: *Moving On* is taught to instructors to allow for differences in teaching styles, as long as all of the same information is covered and conveyed to participants. *R&R* is an almost completely scripted program where instructors are given cues and walked through scenarios on how to engage the participants.
- Length: *Moving On* is a much longer and more extensive program than *R&R* based on the total number of session hours.
- Aftercare program: *Moving On* also gives participants who complete the initial program the option of engaging in an aftercare program. This aftercare program contains booster sessions in order to continue to provide a support system to women who are attempting to reintegrate into the community and also to refresh the participant's memory on any of the modules in the initial program. *R&R* does not offer any sort of aftercare program.

## Discussion and Implications

The results of this study align with the theoretical research on gender-responsive treatment programs. Female-only programs like *Moving On* should focus on relationships because according to relational theory, relationships are one of women's primary motivators. Thus if we can improve the way women interact with others, this can correlate to more pro-social and non-criminal actions in the community as a whole. This logic also supports the presence of an aftercare program for *Moving On*. The support system and relationships that women gain while completing the *Moving On* program may become vital to their successful reintegration into the community, and by continuing to offer this support system as a resource, this could help decrease recidivism in women.

It is important that both *Moving On* and *R&R* use motivational interviewing during their intake sessions. As mentioned in the introduction, motivational interviewing is gender-responsive and serves as a more accurate classification tool for women than the LSI-R. It is also important that the intake processes are the same for both males and females, as the same types of programs are offered to both genders by CSI.

It was expected that *Moving On* and *R&R* would contain some common themes, as there are some risk factors and traits that remain the same for offenders regardless of gender. Also, although *Moving On* places more emphasis on relationship building, it is important to note that positive and healthy relationships play a role in preventing male recidivism as well. *Moving On* takes positive relationship building to the next level by also addressing issues with domestic violence and abusive relationships. It was also expected that *R&R* would place a greater emphasis on anger management, as this is characteristically considered more of a problem for male offenders.

Given the rise in the discussion of the rights of transgender people in recent years, it is important for future studies to examine whether or not gender-responsive programs are effective for a population who identify as a different gender than that assigned to them by their biology. Although this population is small, and the portion of this population who become offenders is even smaller; it is still important to have proper policy in place in order to effectively classify and rehabilitate this population. Future studies should also consider the benefits of implementing gender-responsive programs for women who are incarcerated, as the creation of a sense of community as well as positive relationship-building skills may be beneficial to eventual reintegration into the community.

## References

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