Women who commit sexual offences: Improving assessment to prevent recidivism <1>

Cristiana Viana Cardoso is currently an Assistant Lecturer in Criminology at Coventry University and she's studying towards a PhD related to the primary prevention of child sexual offences. She also volunteers with New Bridge supporting various individuals over the years who are incarcerated for child sexual offences, robbery and others. In the past, she has been a tutor in schools dedicated to helping children (aged 10-12) to resolve issues, such as academic, substance abuse and prostitution as well as developing wider school activities to raise awareness on domestic violence and gender inequalities among young people with disabilities from various social and cultural backgrounds.

Dr Stephanie Kewley has for the past 16 years have worked in several Criminal Justice and Forensic Psychology research, educational, and correctional contexts. Her practitioner and research experience includes the delivery, design and evaluation of interventions (risk assessment tools, risk management planning, and the delivery of cognitive behavioural programmes) to those convicted of sexual and violent assaults; as well as correctional staff (police, probation officers, and psychologists). She is particularly interested in examining strengths-based approaches to prevent sexual violence, writing about this in her forthcoming book with Routledge. "Preventing Sexual Harm: Positive Criminology and Sexual Abuse" (co-authored with Rahman and Pemberton).

Introduction <2>

Men commit more sexual crimes and re-offend at a far greater rate in comparison to women. Still, approximately 5% of people who commit a sexual offence are women, of these, recidivism rates are as low as 1% (Cortoni, *et al*., 2010; Cortoni, 2018). Although official criminal justice records provide an important picture, some caution is needed. They only give partial view of actual prevalence, as official records are limited to crimes being reported to the police. Sexual crimes are grossly under-reported, this is evidenced from alternative sources such as victim disclosure. In an NSPCC study (Mariathasan, 2009) examining the disclosures made to national telephone helpline *ChildLine*, 17% of calls were made in relation to female perpetrated sexual abuse. In fact, where the caller was a male child being victimised, they reported similar rates of female perpetrated abuse (34% female perpetrator, 36% male and 30%

unknown). While female victims reported mainly male-perpetrated abuse (67% compared to 6% female and 28% unknown). Thus, the prevalence and recidivism rates of female sexual offending is likely to be much higher than current official estimates and, with a continued growth in the disclosure and conviction rates, it is more likely that criminal justice practitioners will work with women convicted of sexual abuse.

Our understanding of what motivates women to sexually offend has improved over recent years (Gannon and Cortoni, 2010). Motivations include, for example, the need for intimacy and the need to satisfy or support male co-offenders (Harris, 2010). The latter highlights the potential misleading nature of statistics, as co-offending with a male partner is common (Wijkman, et al., 2011). Our knowledge of how to prevent abuse by women occurring in the first place, or, post detection is, however, less robust. Given that most women do not sexually reoffend, it is therefore important to explore why this is the case. By examining the issue in this way, criminal justice practitioners, who have a duty to assess and manage this population, might begin to support women to not only address underlying issues that may have contributed towards their offending, but also develop strategies to help them desist from crime. While this may be relevant for both men and women who sexually offend, it is particularly useful for women due to their specificities, such as very low re-offending rates and different motivations for offending comparative to men. However, current approaches tend to utilise deficit-based assessment models, which focus mainly on risk reduction. While this continues to be an important area to explore, identifying and understanding factors that help strengthen women's capacity and opportunity to grow is equally if not more important to help women reintegrate safely into the community and cease offending.

The Active Risk Management System (ARMS), a tool aimed at developing a case management plan for those convicted of sexual offences, has been recently implemented into the practice of police and probation officers (Blandford and Kewley, 2017). The unique position of the tool is the strengths-based approach it adopts, that is, while it considers the known risks[1] of sexual recidivism, the tool requires

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[1] Risk factors are "impairments in the capacities and conditions required for effective and ethically acceptable agency" (Ward, 2017:20).

assessors to also consider the strengths and protective factors[2] a client may present which enhance their resilience[3] and agency. This initial tool was developed using the literature focused on men and so its application to female perpetrators is somewhat inadequate. The authors of this chapter were commissioned by the developer of the tool to consider the utility and theoretical strength of the version for women. This chapter summarises the tool and provides a review of the risk and protective factors used to help prevent recidivism. Finally, it highlights recommendations when using strengths-based approaches.

Active Risk Management System – Female (ARMS-F) <2>

In 2017, four years after the implementation of the male version of the ARMS tool, training for national and regional specialist police staff working with women convicted of sexual offending began. Like its male version, the ARMS-F tool is divided into five key sections: a) risk and protective factor domains; b) summary of final risk; c) assessors' rationale for risk management level; d) risk management plan; and e) supervisor review. The risk and protective factors section of this initial female version consisted of ten domains: situational risk; offence supported beliefs; intimacy and social skills deficits; poor emotional self-management; negative dependency/associations; motivation for change; employment/educational assets; self-efficacy/self-esteem; positive family/social support; and, positive professional relationships. To guide assessors in their determination of risk and need, each factor is summarised with examples of evidence. Assessors are required to determine the priority of risk and need based on the evidence they have collected against the criteria outlined in the summary of each domain. To do this, assessors select an option of a high, medium, or low priority rating; following which they must document a summary of the presence of evidence that justifies their rating. Finally, they detail the course of action needed to either reduce the risk or increase the presence of the protective factor (College of Policing, 2017). For the purpose of this chapter, an evaluation of only the first section, that

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[2] Protective factors are considered a group of "conceptually related but distinct ideas" (Ward, 2017: 20) these work as "moderators of risk and adversity to enhance good, that is, developmentally appropriate outcomes (…) [in which] adaptation was more successful than would be the case if the protective factors were not present" (Werner, 2000: 116).

[3] Resilience refers to "an end product of buffering processes that do not eliminate risks and stress but that allow the individual to deal with them effectively" (Werner, 2000: 116).

is risk and protective factors will be focused upon, but first a general commentary on the tool will be made.

General commentary of the ARMS-F <2>

The development of ARMS-F was initially underpinned by an extensive body of empirical research based upon male sexual offender populations. While this pool of literature undoubtedly strengthens the male version of ARMS, this is not the case for the ARMS-F. Men and women both engage on a variety of sexual offending behaviours but have specific pathways into crime and offending motivations more broadly (Cortoni, 2018). Indeed, research into female sexual offending is growing but it is still at least 20 years behind research on men (Cortoni, 2010). While, much of what is known about this group can be drawn from the growing body of literature that explains female offending in general, a tested instrument developed to assess the risk and needs for sexual offending is required. Some of the areas that have been more developed are related to the nature of the offences, prevalence and their characteristics as well as common previous experiences (such as abuse, mental health and beliefs). This has encouraged the conceptualisation of 'typical pathways' for women who sexually offend. However, this is not yet nuanced enough to develop a comprehensive and holistic theoretical explanation. Furthermore, some risk and protective factors have been identified in the literature, which explain recidivism to some extent (Cortoni, 2018), but this literature is significantly lacking comparative to men, particularly for sexual recidivism as opposed to general reoffending

One of the key areas not included in the current version of the ARMS-F is the use of a static actuarial tool to predict recidivism. In the male version, Risk Matrix 2000 (RM2000) is used; this allows assessors to consider their own clinical assessment to that of an empirically tested actuarial tool. Such consideration enables the assessor to produce a far more robust and considered assessment. Assessors can consider both static and dynamic factors that are known to be related to sexual recidivism. No such tool exists for female perpetrators of sexual abuse, as such, the ARMS-F is somewhat weakened when compared to its male equivalent.

A further observation is that the priority rating descriptions and the scoring system are limited. Rating descriptions appear general and similar, across the whole tool, making it not only repetitive, but assessors may struggle to distinguish between domains. For example, the high priority rating for 'intimacy and social skills deficit' states, "rating indicates a strong presence of problems with intimacy and social skills, this exists to the extent that it could trigger imminent offending. Urgent action is required" (College of Policing, 2017: 5) this however is very similar to the high priority rating description for 'poor emotional self-management': "rating indicates extensive problems in this area. She is extremely vulnerable and presented with opportunity she is likely to offend. Urgent is action is required" (College of Policing, 2017: 6). A tailored description for each factor and rating is needed. Likewise, the scoring system does not appear sensitive enough to cope with some of the variants an assessor might want to recognise in their assessment. One of the problems with having only limited and arguably rigid classifications, mean that assessors are more likely to assess with more caution and escalate risk. This to some extent undermines the ability of the assessor to use their professional judgment. A potential solution might be to use a larger scaled continuum between the complete absence of a factor and its presence.

A final general concern noted is the language bias used in relation to the sexuality of the client. For example, descriptors and rationale presented women as heterosexual, in that if she had been influenced or coerced to offend by another person, this person, according to initial descriptors, would be male. This flaw does not consider the range of sexual orientations of female perpetrators nor gendered combinations of likelihood of co-offender couples and groups. For example, in the first factor (situational risk) descriptor reads "the coerced or male associated offender could become vulnerable to seeking out such situations as a means to please the male" and; "does she associate with an anti-social male/male in circumstances that could create a vulnerability" (College of Policing, 2017: 3). Likewise, the fifth factor (negative dependency/associations) is solely based on heterosexual relationships. The descriptor provides no opportunity for the assessor to consider the multiplicity of sexual orientations and associations.

The notion of designing and developing a gender specific tool presents a range of problems in and of itself. For example, if a male perpetrator identifies as a woman it is unclear which tool would be more adequate. Its selection assumes the sex and gender would be the same but if different, the tool does not indicate whether the assessor should select one according to the clients' sex or chosen gender. At this point, it is difficult to offer a definitive answer as this question reaches beyond the aim of this chapter. However, the drive to assess and treat women differently to men is perhaps a reflection of the social construction surrounding women, sex and crime (Heimer, 1996). Nevertheless, research often focus on the duality of sex and so the following analysis of each factor will be founded on that assumption.

Analysis of the risk and protective ARMS-F domains <2>

The following section provides a detailed analysis of the risk and protective domains from the ARMS-F and provides suggestions as to how this could be improved going forwards, which will be of interest to practitioners using such tools and working with female sex offenders.

Situational Risk <3>

Situational risk refers to the opportunity, in a geographical, environmental and physical sense, that the person has access to. Some of the situational factors to take in consideration are: effort needed to access potential victims, risk of detection, prompts/triggers (for example high risk situations, such as intimate activities with the potential victim) and permissibility (Wortley and Smallbone, 2006). This factor is important to understand if she will be facing new opportunities to reoffend. However, it conflates two different concepts that should not be confused, that is the situation in which an offence may take place, and, a preference of victim (Blandford and Kewley, 2017).

Victim preference refers to the personal characteristics of a victim that are of interest to the perpetrator, most obvious would be a preferred gender or age. However, characteristics could be broader than this. These preferences are related to motivations to offend and circumstances that led to it (Robertiello and Terry, 2007). They are also linked with typologies of female sexual offenders, for example, according to Matthews, *et al*. (1989) the teacher/lover type would most likely target adolescent males.

This factor also refers to the kind of decisions and behaviour the client plans to take which may increase or decrease access to victims, and whether those choices were motivated by a desire to continue to have unsupervised access to potential victims and, therefore, continue the offending behaviour. This occurs by analysing their lifestyle /daily routine (College of Policing, 2017).

This is a standard factor on risk assessments and most research has focused on men. Like other factors, its relevance and manifestation could be gendered. While for men the opportunity to overcome resistance from the victim and lack of a capable guardian may be key (Wortley and Smallbone, 2006), for women, this factor is more complex due to differing pathways and motives. Hence, for women, the situational aspects of her previous offending behaviours would need to be analysed in conjunction with offence supported beliefs and these two areas should be considered concurrently to achieve a better understanding. For example, the availability of potential victim types may be less relevant if other situational factors in the basis of offending are no longer present (for example, she no longer holds a relationship with the co-offender). Furthermore, in terms of clarity, instead of naming this domain 'situational risk', it is suggested to change it to 'accessing potential victims' or 'conditions favourable to offend'.

Offence supportive beliefs <3>

Offence supportive beliefs domain relate to the thoughts and beliefs surrounding potential victims, the client's past offending behaviour and wider longstanding beliefs of gender roles and entitlements. This is one of the most widely researched areas for women (Cortoni and Gannon, 2016). Research suggests there are four types of offence supportive beliefs: a) women who abuse adolescent boys tend to give them adult status and so perceive their relationship as mutually consensual (like falling in love); b) women who abuse younger children (their own or others) are more likely (than the other types) to have deviant fantasies and use violence in addition to consider them to be sexually interested; c) women who have co-offenders (the most common type) may have been coerced and so only offend in the presence of the coercer due to fear or emotional dependency along with a severe stereotypical idea of men being powerful and women powerless, however, others accompanied but non-coerced tend to participate more actively in the abuse and may continue even without a co-offender (underlying motivations such as a

mean to an end, revenge, humiliation); and d) women who abuse adults are uncommon and tend to target other women too, for example, prostitution for financial gain (Matthews, *et al.*, 1989; Atkinson, 1996; Vandiver and Kercher, 2004; Cortoni, 2009; Harris, 2010). Nevertheless, these categories can be considered limited by not meeting taxonomical expectations, for example, some women may exhibit diversity or change profile with time, they can give the impression of each type being more distinct than they really are (oversimplification) (Hagan, 2008).

While offence supportive cognitions are an important aspect to assess when determining treatment needs (Ford, 2006; Gannon, *et al.*, 2012), the description of these cognitions in the ARMS-F focus solely on children. The tool ought to assess a wide range of offence supportive beliefs, not all will be specific to children. Offence support beliefs should, therefore, reflect a variety of victims and beliefs. This can be amended by using the expression "preferred victim type" and so it would be adaptable to a wider variety of cases.

Intimacy and social skills deficits <3>

The description of "intimacy and social skills deficits" factor focuses mainly on analysing past sexual and intimate relationships, such as duration, nature of the relationship (for example, healthy or with issues, such as domestic violence) and sexual gratification. The descriptor infers that a woman should be able to form and maintain appropriate intimate relationships in which she has a clear sense of sexual identity and/or is sexual active, for example: "difficulty in forming or maintaining appropriate intimate relationships that leaves them vulnerable to seeking a sense of intimacy, power and being loved through abusive sexual acts", "she lacks a sense of sexual identity or is sexually passive", "she experiences significant periods of loneliness" (College of Policing, 2017: 5).

This factor has not been widely researched in relation to female sexual offending. However, known common characteristics of those who have been convicted show a range of long histories of abuse, problematic developmental attachment experiences and unhealthy adult relationships (Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Faller, 1987; Gannon, et al., 2008; Gannon, et al., 2012). Sexual inadequacies may be present in some women, which may be related to issues such as sexual history (education and experiences that

impact later views on sex and offending behaviour); sexual regulation patterns (sex may be seen as a tool for personal needs such as, emotional and intimacy needs towards someone other than the victim, for example taking indecent images of a child to please an adult partner); and victimisation history (particularly sexual abuse as a child and physical abuse as an adult) (Cortoni, 2018; Marshal and Miller, 2018). Her views on an intimate relationship are linked to cognition and derive from her own experience. For such women, abuse may have been somewhat normalised or at least reveal an underdevelopment of these skills (Ford, 2006; Gannon, *et al*., 2012; Cortoni and Gannon, 2016)

While the desire for intimacy due to isolation and loneliness may lead women to inappropriately seeking intimacy or increase the likelihood of male co-offenders taking advantage of that (extreme dependency), the focus should be on the emotional state rather than sexual preoccupation (Eldridge and Saradjian, 2000; Cortoni and Gannon, 2016). This is because women's motivation to sexually offend is often due to emotional influences (such as the desire to please and keep a partner to avoid loneliness) rather than sexual preferences/deviance. Moreover, this factor does not take in consideration asexuality or a woman's choice to not have an intimate and sexual relationship. Furthermore, female perpetrated paedophilia is rare (Saradjian, 1996; Darling and Antonopoulus, 2013).

It is argued, therefore, the focus of this factor should be narrowed to analyse her social bonds, the nature and quality of attachment to those around her, such as family, partners and friends. This would be something to analyse beyond only sexual orientation and intimacy skills, as problematic relationships have been highlighted as a relevant factor in relation to female sexual offending (Cortoni, 2018). By refining this domain and removing any overlap with other areas this content would be implicit within other factors (namely, offence related beliefs, accessing potential victims, emotional stability and social support).

Poor emotional self-management <3>

The factor 'poor emotional self-management' includes adequateness of emotional responses, resilience (ability to cope with life stressors), assertiveness, and level of empowerment. It also relates to cognitive functioning deficits, mental illness, personality disorders and/or the consumption of alcohol or drugs to

numb these negative effects. Anxiety-related disorders, depression, borderline features, and dominance are also particularly linked with rearrests of female sexual offenders' post-release (Matthews, 1993; Gannon and Rose, 2008; Johansson-Love and Freemon, 2009; Voorhis, *et al.*, 2010; Marshal and Miller, 2018).

The domain also relates to self-efficacy and self-esteem, in which low levels would increase the likelihood of being influenced by others, which is particularly relevant for sexual co-offending. Self-management, self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-confidence are highly relevant to empowerment and valued by gender-responsive literature. This has been identified as a protective factor for women and an area that professionals can actively increase or encourage (Matthews, 1993; Gannon and Rose, 2008; Johansson-Love and Fremon, 2009; Voorhis, *et al.*, 2010; College of Policing, 2017).

This factor assesses whether the person has the psychological skills and strength to cease offending and desist crime. If deemed a substantial risk, she may need psychological assistance to help empower herself to be independent and successfully reintegrate in the community. However, one of the problems with this domain is that it is duplicated in the 'self-efficacy and self-esteem' domain.

Self-efficacy/self-esteem <3>

As in the earlier factor, self-efficacy and self-esteem draws on the emotional self-management domain. Self-efficacy relates to whether the client believes in her own ability to succeed in a particular situation and is associated with self-esteem, her sense of her own value and worth. These areas are linked and overlap with emotional self-management. Given much of this factor is already addressed in 'poor emotional self-management' domain, it is argued that these domains ought to be merged to enhance the logic and flow of the assessment and remove any repetitions.

Negative dependency/associations <3>

The factor 'negative dependency/associations', draws on friends, family, and other acquaintances who might negatively influence the woman's life. This is relevant not only within co-offending and abusive

relations, but also wider friendships and relationships. The factor examines whether these relationships might assist or compound efforts to successfully reintegrate back into the community.

This domain further assesses her ability to cope with stress and life events. It is argued that coping skills are greatly enhanced when coupled with positive supportive networks While the presence of negative dependency/associations have the potential to promote relapse, the presence of pro-social support might play a role in buffering future associations with more harmful associates and reduce the likelihood of dependency (along with emotional stability). The existence of positive influences is therefore important for maintaining and enhancing the desistance process (Rumgray, 2004; Blanchette and Brown, 2006; Cortoni, 2018).

This is particularly relevant for women as statistics suggest that around half of female sex offenders co-offended with a man (Wijkman, et al., 2011). Male coercion is a distinctive aspect for female sexual offending that highlights the need for treatment and support in several areas which extend beyond social bonds, such as low self-esteem. However, a clearer understanding of male coercion is needed (Cortoni and Gannon, 2016). For example, research suggests that in some cases, while women identify themselves as being coerced, a thoroughly analysis revealed that they also offended independently (even if such only started after associating with the co-perpetrator) (Saradjian and Hanks, 1996; Heil, *et al.*, 2010). Further research is also needed to assess the extent to which pro-social support can reduce the influence of male coercive techniques.

Furthermore, this factor should be evaluated in relation to the client's current situation in addition to her history, as this may have changed considerably over time. Future iterations of the assessment ought to make this element clear in its advice to assessors, as in its current form it fails to do this. The aim of the assessment is to identify current needs and risk/protective factors, this factor is fundamental not just regarding future sexual offending but also general offending behaviours. A final problem with this domain is that the factor named positive family/social support, draws on the same topic but from the opposite perspective. These two factors are, therefore, overlapping and so they should be merged to gather a complete analysis of her social bonds.

Positive family/social support <3>

Having a close and valued relationship with pro-social others (family, friends and/or partners) who know the client well and can provide healthy emotional support, can significantly help the person to desist from offending. Such relationships provide confidence that the individual is able to reintegrate successfully and conform to societal norms (Rumgray, 2004; Blanchette and Brown, 2006;). The analysis of this domain, however, ought to be incorporated with negative social bonds factor so that they can be evaluated on the presence and intersection of positive and negative influences.

Motivation to change <3>

Motivation to change is a key factor to rehabilitation and indicates the clients' readiness to desist from future offending (Ford, 2010). Female sex offenders typically tend to take responsibility for their actions and so are less likely than male sex offenders to deny their behaviour (Matthews, *et al*., 1989).

This factor can be measured through emotions towards past actions (such as anger at herself, feelings of shame and remorse, ability to differentiate her current situation from the offending past) and desires for change to avoid further offending. More importantly, when intentions are translated into action and change can be measured. Actions include steps to change the circumstances that led to offending and strategies to avoid risky situations. Constructive engagement with professionals and programmes towards positive transformation is also an indicator of motivation for change (College of Policing, 2017).

Employment and education <3>

Engaging with pro-social institutions and activities opens contact with pro-social individuals and helps give purpose and routine with the potential for a sense of agency to emerge (Lageson and Uggen, 2013; College of Policing, 2017; Cottle, 2017). While employment and education are important, this factor could expand to take into consideration other similar agencies that contribute to contact with pro-social individuals and activities, such as volunteering and attending church (Giordano, *et al*. 2008). A woman may be able to stay financially independent without working (for example, possess large financial

assets) and as such less vulnerable to financial abuse. It is suggested this factor to be renamed as "integration in the society" to reflect and include wider variety of pro-social institutions.

Positive professional relationships <3>

The last factor focuses on analysing the relationship between the woman and the various professionals she is/was in contact with, such as the assessor, prison officers and other practitioners. This evaluation takes into consideration all these relationships as a whole. In other words, she may not have a good relationship with a particular professional but if there are no issues with any of the others, it indicates she is generally engaging with the professionals successfully which support the desistance process. However, if she does not have mostly positive relationships then such reasons need to be analysed, as they could be related to an inertia to change or valid reasons. Ashfield, *et al*. (2010) found that female sex offenders often report professionals do not listen to what they say. This would relate not necessarily to their words but their intrinsic meaning. For example, their apparent emotionless response to their actions could be interpreted by a professional as evidence of risk of reoffending while she may only be closing emotional effects due to unbearable high levels of shame/guilt. A positive relationship has two elements: the professional's behaviour and her perceptions of it (Marshall, *et al*., 2003). These situations should be taken in consideration as they affect the quality of professional relationships.

Female sexual offenders often experience problematic relationships throughout their lives, characterised by neglect and abuse (Faller, 1987; Gannon, et al., 2008; Gannon, et al., 2012). Positive professional relationships are a way to learn and experience healthy relationships, beyond just assisting their engagement with assessments and treatment programmes (Bloom, *et al*., 2005; Ashfield, *et al*., 2010). Therefore, this domain is relevant to assess but it should be done with caution to prevent precipitated conclusions based on isolated negative professional relationships, but instead develops an overall assessment of the quality of all professional relationships and underlying reasons.

Analysis summary <3>

Research on female sexual offenders has resulted in mostly descriptive theories, with some more developed explanations. However, many theories lack nuance, and knowledge is not yet developed

enough to create strong etiological theory. This is partially due to the low number of female sex offenders (compared to men) and even lower recidivism rates. Therefore, the strength of this tool and any modifications is bound by the progress of extant research. Any suggestions are, therefore, a work in progress. Table one summarises the changes outlined earlier aimed to present a more robust tool that requires testing and 'real world' application.

Table 1: Summary of ARMS-F tool analysis.

ANALYSIS OF THE ARMS-F	SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE
Adapted from the male version which was based on an extensive body of empirical research on male sexual offender populations	While research on female sexual offenders is still limited, it has developed since the first version of the tool. An updated tool should be based on new research as well as wider research about women as offenders and victims (for example, considers the cycle of power within male coerced offending)
At first glance, most factors from literature seem to have been included	Adding the influence of reconviction and the nature of the initiative as a standalone factor as well as financial independency. It also reduces the focus on sexual life and interests, shifting it to emotional attachment and social relationships.
Assume all women being evaluated are heterosexual, feminine and if she has been influenced or coerced to offend by someone, this person would be male	Acknowledge the variety of sexual orientations. Women can be influenced/coerced by other women besides men. Due to wider regulations, this tool would still be used on women (based on sex) who do not identify themselves as such.

Appears rather complicated to navigate if not used for a long time	Improve layout to enhance self-explanatory nature of the tool. For example, enhanced priority rating descriptions
Fixed nominal rating options	More flexibility with numbered ratings
Overlapping information	Not present
'Situational risk': relevant but its description could be clearer	Becomes 'accessing potential victims': relevant, placed after 'offence related beliefs' as they are linked. Its description also clarified
'Offence supportive beliefs': relevant but its description seems to focus only on victims being children	Becomes 'offence related beliefs (cognition)': relevant, updated description
'Intimacy and social skills deficits': somewhat unclear/confusing/overlapping	This would have been included into other factors to avoid overlapping and clarify its scope
'Poor emotional self-management': relevant but some overlap with 'self-efficacy/self-esteem' factor	These two factors can be merged into one as 'emotional stability'
'Negative dependency/associations': relevant but overlapping with 'positive family/social support' factor	These two factors can be merged into one as 'social support'
'Motivation to change': relevant	Unchanged
'Employment and education': relevant but limited	Becomes 'integration in the society' to include a wider variety of institutions

'Positive professional relationships': relevant but should be analysed with caution	Becomes 'professional relationships' and its description includes further guidance on how to assess it to prevent superficial conclusions

Some of the areas highlighted for improvement were inevitably linked with the development of the tool being based on ARMS-M rather than emerging from the female offending literature. Although some domains may overlap between male and female populations, sexual offending processes are very different. For example, the notion of sexual preoccupation for men is a key factor, while emotional attachment is more important for female offenders (Cortoni, 2018). Thus, it is recommended that clarification and a refocus of domain descriptors is needed. Likewise, heteronormative language needs addressing, along with the assumptive commentary regarding victims being children. There was also some overlap between domains, while this is perhaps unavoidable at times, the descriptors for each domain needs to be clearer regarding this overlap.

Some factors, like 'motivation to change' and 'offence support beliefs', seemed accurate and relevant with only minor suggestions for improvement (such as discourse alterations). However, others present more problematic aspects that impact on the effectiveness and ease of use (for example, 'negative dependency/associations' and 'positive family/social support' contain duplication). Based on this critique, an updated version, simplified and without overlapping factors, would include seven domains including: offence related believes (cognition); assessing potential victims; emotional stability; motivation to change; integration in the society; social support and, professional relationships.

Overall, this tool presented a good start but work still needs to be done in order to determine whether it is covering all the relevant areas related to sexual and general reoffending for women. This, however, is dependent on how research progresses in the future.

Suggested new factors <3>

In addition to the changes mentioned earlier, two domains are suggested for consideration in a new version of the ARMS-F tool to address a gap, these include: the nature of the offence initiative; and, financial independency. Each are discussed in turn briefly here.

Concerning the former, literature indicates that when women initiate sexual offending alone, there is a higher likelihood of reoffending. Whereas, the presence of coercion indicates she offended due to fear, low self-esteem, or emotional attachment. Nevertheless, some women who are initially coerced may also progress to solo offending. The underlying motivations and reasons need to also be considered (Grayston and De Luca, 1999; Johanson-Love and Freemou, 2006; Vandiver, 2007; Sandler and Freeman, 2009; Cortoni, 2018). Prior conviction for child abuse has been found to be predictive of recidivism (Sandler and Freeman, 2009). Cortoni (2018) highlights women convicted of promoting prostitution also have a higher likelihood of reoffending, as the nature of this offence is more consistent with those of general offending rather than traditional sexual offending. This is because their motivation is mostly financial. Prostitution is seen as an exchange of goods, rather than an emotional based act. Sandler and Freeman (2009) explored the recidivism rates of 1,466 female sexual offenders in New York and found a 1.59% reoffending rate for sexual offenders and 12.66% for women who have been convicted of promotion of prostitution. Prior criminal history (particularly of a sexual nature) is therefore a relevant aspect to take in consideration when analysing the risk of general and sexual reoffending.

In turn, financial independency refers to the capacity to live without depending on monetary assistance from other people or agencies, such as the government. Having the ability to be financially independent can for example open opportunities to stable and secure housing. The presence of these assets was found to help women achieve a sense of agency and can support desistence from offending (Blandford, 2018). Financial independence and the motivation to be independent reduces vulnerability towards negative influences/dependency from others (Department for International Development, 2013; Lageson and Uggen, 2013; Fontes, 2015; College of Policing, 2017). Finally, one of the potential motivations to offend, even without negative influences from others, is for monetary gain. Therefore, this domain focus on analysing if such financial independency is present and maintained without the need to resort to non-

pro-social activities and, at the same time, achieving financial empowerment reduces vulnerability towards negative influences/dependency.

Conclusion: Recommendations for practitioners <2>

Greater understanding of women who sexually offend is needed to prevent recidivism and to ensure that appropriate support is provided throughout the desistance process. Research on women as sexual offenders is decades behind that of men, but one of the most important findings is the need for a gendered approach (Cortoni, 2018). It is therefore fundamental to acknowledge common and divergent factors and the way they manifest. For example, ARMS-M would over-estimate the likelihood of recidivism for a woman as its bases rates are much higher than those for women. It is recommended here that when providing support to female sex offenders, practitioners should focus on the range of factors identified above, rather than using tools designed for male sex offenders.

Additionally, while sexual recidivism within female populations is rare, action to help prevent any further harm (sexual or otherwise) caused by women convicted of sexual offending is essential. Women who enter the Criminal Justice System should receive appropriate management and treatment. An adequate assessment of risk and a focus on strengths and treatment needs is, therefore, required. This ARMS-F tool is a useful starting point, but more work is needed to enhance it. This tool aims not only to identify risks directly related to sexual offending but also offer guidance on wider areas that could be enhanced to move women away from crime (sexual or otherwise) by incorporating a holistic view and a focus on protective factors. Protective factors offer an opportunity to buffer risk and increase opportunity for agency in the desistance process (Werner, 2000; Ward, 2007). This means women having the strength to choose a different path and not reoffend. We recommend practitioners working with female sex offenders to emphasise strength-based approaches to successfully predict and prevent further offending. These approaches are useful to enhance their skills and resilience to face a variety of challenges throughout their lives (Sheehan, et al., 2011).

Criminal justice interventions that focus on protective factors have revealed promising outcomes (such as helping to enhance social support). However, the needs of those who have committed an offence are often not always met, particularly given the limited availability of interventions and the profit led focus

of governments and policy makers which tend to prioritise risk focused interventions within prison, probation or voluntary sectors (Kewley, 2016). This is, however, counterproductive. In the long term, the costs of crime (and reoffending) will be higher than those of prevention. These are not only monetary but also societal (such as victimisation).

In conclusion, while men overwhelmingly perpetrate most sexual violence (and women more likely to be the victim), this should not mean that women who do sexually offend should not be provided with appropriate gendered support. Strengths-based approaches are fundamental to women in cases of sexual offending, as their typical motivations to offend are often related to their prior victimisation, desire for intimacy and other emotional needs or lack of skills (such as social). Such strategies have the potential to provide them with the tools to empower them and reintegrate them into the community as an active and pro-social member.

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