

“What Works” for Female Probationers?  
An Evaluation of the *Moving On* Program

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Female offenders represent a growing percentage of the criminal justice population in the United States. For example, between 1997 and 2007, the number of women on probation increased from 524,200 to 987,427 (Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 1998; 2008). This represents an 88 percent increase over the span of a decade. During that same time-period, the percentage increase for male probationers was only 21 percent. The increasing numbers of women offenders and the scarcity of programs and services geared toward their needs have prompted criminal justice professionals to consider implementing gender-responsive programs (Bloom, 2000). Historically, failure to provide gender-specific programming for women in the system has been justified by the fact that women accounted for only a small percentage of arrests and committed fewer and less serious crimes than men (Morash, Haarr, & Rucker, 1994; Rafter, 1990). However, with the continued increase of women entering the criminal justice system since the 1970s, this excuse is no longer valid. Since traditionally much focus has been on the overwhelming numbers of males in the criminal and justice system, programs developed to service this population often have failed to develop options to address the gender-specific problems of women offenders (Bloom, 2000).

Despite the focus on male offenders, programs *have* emerged that address the gendered risks and needs of women offenders. Women who enter into the system often have significant program needs such as histories of trauma and abuse, mental health issues, substance abuse, parenting issues, and relationship issues (Covington, 2000; McClellan, Farabee, & Crouch, 1997; Van Voorhis and Hardyman, 2001; Van Voorhis, Salisbury, Wright, and Bauman, 2008). As such, it is important to discover whether programs that address these needs are effective in reducing recidivism. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research on the effectiveness of these new program models (Bloom, 2000). To help address the gap in this literature, the current study

is the first to examine the effectiveness of the gender-responsive, cognitive behavioral, program *Moving On*. A demonstration of treatment effects for this program would have important implications for the management and treatment of women offenders in the future.

### **Description of the *Moving On* program**

The development of *Moving On* was influenced by three complementary approaches- Relational Theory, Motivational Interviewing, and Cognitive-Behavioral Intervention . The primary goal of *Moving On* is to provide opportunities for women to mobilize and enhance existing strengths and to access personal and community resources (Van Dieten and MacKenna, 2001). This is achieved by: a) treating women with respect and dignity, b) providing an environment that is supportive, empathic, accepting, collaborative, and challenging, c) assisting women to build a healthy and mutually supportive network , d) introduce an array of personal strategies, including decision-making, problem-solving, assertiveness skills, emotional regulation, and, e) assist women with the challenges of reintegration (Bauman, Gehring, and Van Voorhis, 2009; Van Dieten and MacKenna, 2001).

*Moving On* is a 26-session, curriculum-based program. The program consists of nine modules:

- Setting the Context for Change
- Women in Society
- Taking Care of Yourself
- Family Messages
- Relationships
- Coping with Emotions and Harmful Self-Talk
- Problem-Solving
- Becoming Assertive
- Moving On

During each session, participants engage in exercises that increase their self-awareness, emphasize their existing strengths and competencies, and teach them new skills. The program

helps participants realize the patterns of their behavior and the major events or negative feelings that cause them to offend. This awareness allows participants to recognize these situations when they arise and motivates them to use positive coping mechanisms they learn throughout the program. These coping mechanisms help them avoid these criminogenic circumstances and aide them in choosing positive, crime-free alternatives to these situations (Bauman et al., 2009; Van Dieten & MacKenna, 2001).

In 1998, the Iowa Department of Corrections implemented *Moving On* because the numbers of women coming under correctional supervision had increased to the point that correctional personnel believed programs were necessary to target the unique needs of women offenders. This study examines the effectiveness of *Moving On* among probationers who entered the program between 2003 and 2006. The women probationers who attended the *Moving On* program did so once a week for six months. Each session lasted 1 ½ to 2 hours.

### **Data and Study Design**

Data for this study were obtained from the Iowa Department of Corrections' database, the Iowa Corrections Offender Network (ICON). The samples consisted of women probationers who participated in *Moving On* and a matched comparison group of women probationers who did not participate in *Moving On* nor in any other cognitive-behavioral program during the same time period. The program participants were matched to comparison group members on the basis of Iowa judicial district, race, age, LSI-R risk category, and probationary time period. For example, if the *Moving On* participant began probation in June of 2004, we matched her to a probationer who began probation during that same month and year. If it was not possible to match her to a probationer who began probation during the same month and year, we matched her to a person who began probation either the month before or the month after.

## Sample

A total of 268 were admitted to *Moving On* during the time period under study. This number reduced to 190 with the omission of: a) those in districts that had only one participant in the *Moving On* program (N= 3)<sup>1</sup>; and b) women who were removed from *Moving On* for an administrative reason that precluded any opportunity to succeed or fail (i.e., case manager discretion, ineligible to attend, inappropriate referral, transferred to a different location, death) (N= 68). Additionally, the study was limited to African-Americans and whites as there were too few participants of other racial groups in the sample to match to other persons of the same race and the other three matching variables (N=7). The resulting sample consisted of these 190 *Moving On* probationers and 190 matched probationers.

## Outcome Measures

Long-term outcome measures obtained from ICON indicated whether all probationers in the sample had been rearrested, convicted, incarcerated, or had a technical violation during 12, 18, 24, and 30 month follow-up periods following the participants' completion of *Moving On*. Since *Moving On* probationers and regular probationers were matched on the time they were on probation, the same *Moving On* intervention closure date was used to measure the follow up periods for the probation comparison group.

Results are examined once for all participants and once for just the program completers. The analysis of the effects of program completion involved removal of non completers and their matched comparisons from the sample.

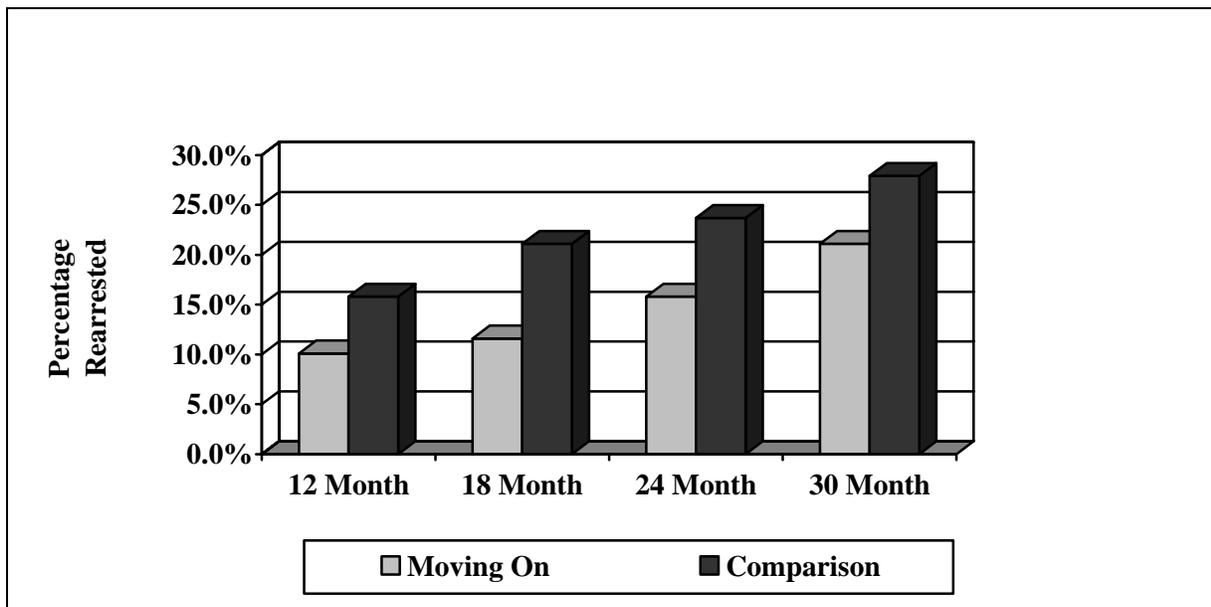
## Results

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<sup>1</sup> This limited the study's focus to the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> Iowa judicial districts.

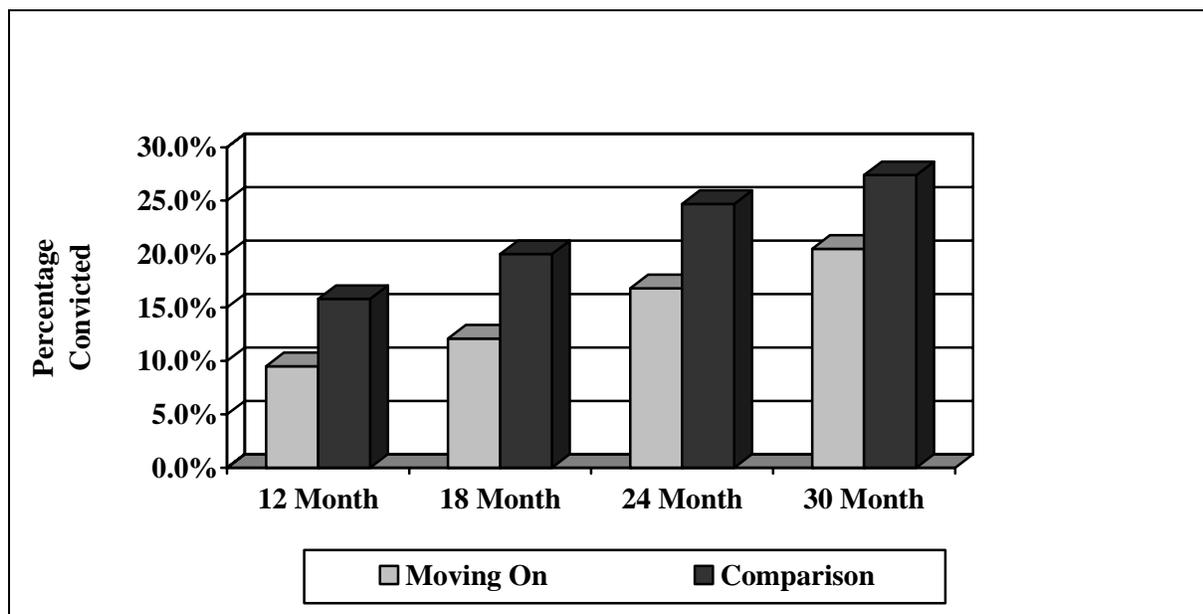
**Rearrests.** The first group of analyses examined *Moving On* participants (completers and non-completers) and their matched probationers. As illustrated in Figure 1, rearrest rates for *Moving On* participants were lower than the comparison group. Differences between the *Moving On* group and the comparison group were statistically significant at 18 months ( $p = .012$ ), and 24 months ( $p = .053$ ) with over all treatment effects ranging from 5.8 percent to 9.5 percent.

**Figure 1. Rearrest Rates for *Moving On* and Comparison Groups**



**Convictions.** The second analysis of convictions between the two groups revealed similar trends as the rearrest data. As illustrated in Figure 2, conviction rates for *Moving On* participants were lower than the comparison group. These were also statistically significant at 18 months ( $p \leq .05$ ) and 24 months ( $p = .058$ ). Over all treatment effects for the program ranged from 6.3 percent to 7.9 percent.

**Figure 2. Conviction Rates for *Moving On* and Comparison Groups**



***Incarcerations.*** Analysis for incarcerations revealed that there were no differences between the two groups. This was not surprising, as these women were not sent to prison at a high rate. After 30 months, only 17.9 percent (N=34) of the *Moving On* sample had been incarcerated and 16.3 percent (N=31) of the matched probationers had been sent to prison.

***Technical Violations.*** *Moving On* participants did have significantly more technical violations than their matched probationers. There were statistically significant differences for technical violations for 12 months ( $p \leq .01$ ), 18 months ( $p \leq .01$ ), 24 months ( $p \leq .001$ ), and 30 months ( $p \leq .001$ ). By the end of the 30 month follow up period, 16.9 percent of the *Moving On* probationers had acquired a technical violation compared to only 3.7 percent of the matched probationers.

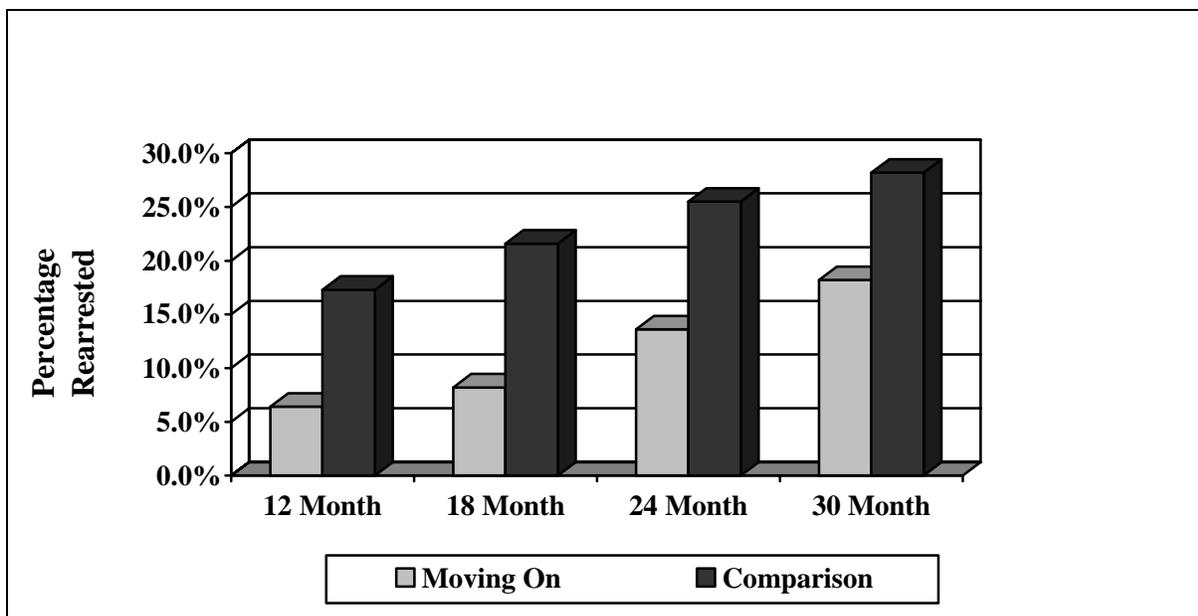
### **Effects of Program Completion**

We conducted additional analyses to examine how completion of the *Moving On* program affected these recidivism measures. To do this, we removed the non-completers and their

matched probationers from the data. This created a sample of completers (N=111) and their matched probationers (N=111).

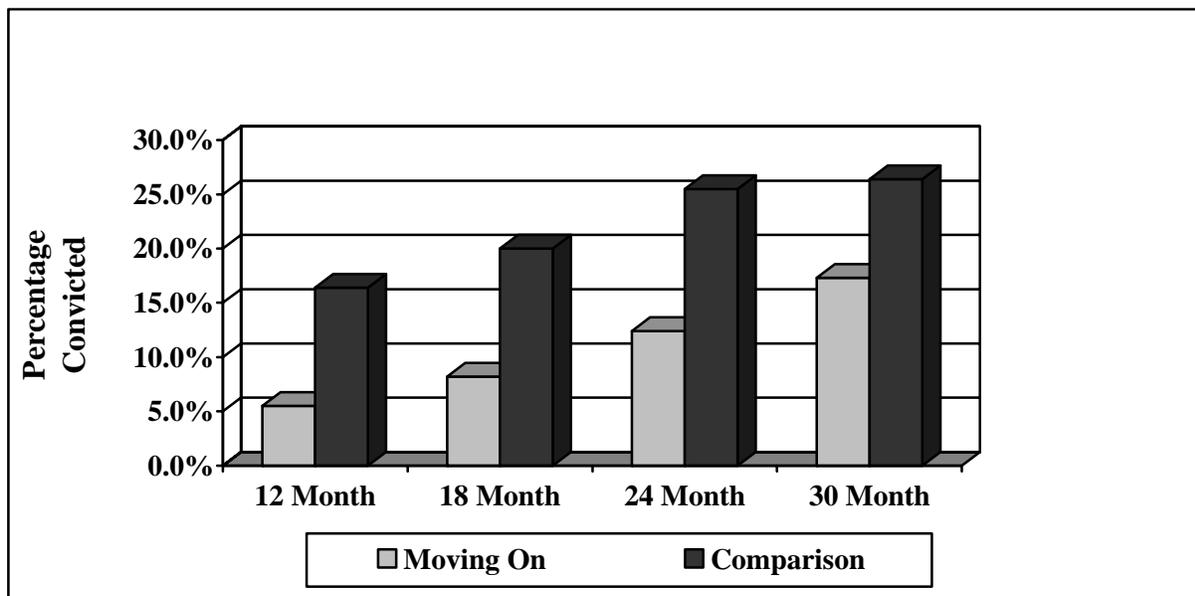
**Rearrests.** Like the comparison above, the *Moving On* group had lower rearrest rates than their matched probationers. However, as illustrated in Figure 3, their rearrest rates were lower than the group that included both completers and non-completers. Differences between the *Moving On* group and the comparison group were statistically significant for all follow up periods: 12 months ( $p = .012$ ), 18 months ( $p \leq .01$ ), 24 months ( $p \leq .05$ ) and 30 months ( $p = .057$ ). Treatment effects for the program were larger, ranging from 10.8 percent to 13.5 percent.

**Figure 3. Rearrest Rates for *Moving On* Completers and Comparison Group**



**Convictions.** Similar to the rearrests for the completers, the convictions were lower than the group that included the non-completers (see Figure 4). Statistically significant differences occurred at the 12 month ( $p \leq .01$ ), 18 month ( $p = .012$ ) and 24 month ( $p = .016$ ) follow up periods. Treatment effects for convictions were similar to the rearrests, ranging from 10.8 percent to 12.6 percent.

**Figure 4. Conviction Rates for *Moving On* Completers and Comparison Group**



***Incarcerations.*** Interestingly, unlike the incarceration analysis above, the incarceration rates of the *Moving On* completers and the comparison group were statistically significant. Completion of the *Moving On* program had a significant effect on incarcerations following the program. Differences were statistically significant for the 12 month ( $p \leq .05$ ), 24 month ( $p \leq .05$ ), and 30 month ( $p \leq .05$ ) time periods. Although small numbers of women were incarcerated from this sample, at the end of 30 month follow-up period, 18 (16.2 percent) of the matched probationers had been incarcerated compared to only seven (6.3 percent) *Moving On* completers.

***Technical Violations.*** Analysis of this outcome measure revealed no difference between the *Moving On* completers and the matched probationers. This suggests that the individuals who committed the technical violations in analysis of the completers and non-completers were the women violated for program non participation.

## **Implications of the Findings**

The results from this evaluation indicate the *Moving On* program is effective in reducing recidivism. These results have important implications for the future of women's criminal justice programming. First, evidence of treatment effects indicates that a gender-responsive program, one that targets risk factors and needs unique to women, is effective in reducing recidivism. Second, this analysis illustrates that cognitive behavioral programming is an appropriate treatment modality for women offenders. Lastly, the evidence presented here supports *Moving On* as an evidence based program. The following discussion will highlight why these are such important findings.

There has been an ongoing debate in the correctional literature regarding whether risk factors for women differ from men. Many scholars have argued that there are no differences in risk factors across gender. They propose that general risk factors that are important for male offending are also important for female offending (Andrews & Bonta, 2006; Dowden & Andrews, 1999; Simourd & Andrews, 1994). This implies that the proximate causes of criminality are "general" rather than "gender-specific." Therefore, programs that are "gender-neutral" should have the same effect for reducing recidivism of female offenders as they do for male offenders. Additionally, this implies that programs which address gender-responsive risk factors will not be effective or as effective as gender-neutral programs as they do not target criminogenic needs (i.e., antisocial personality, antisocial associates, antisocial attitudes, beliefs, and values) that have been statistically associated with recidivism (Gendreau, 1996; Gendreau, Little, & Goggin, 1996).

However, other research has offered evidence that women offenders may have unique risk factors and needs. Correctional personnel have indicated they recognize women offenders

have problems regarding victimization, childcare, self-esteem, relationships, health, substance abuse, mental health (Hardyman & Van Voorhis, 2004) and that women represent a more troubled group than male offenders (Presser & Van Voorhis, 2001). Recent research has discovered that gender-responsive risk factors, such as dysfunctional relationships, family conflict, parental stress, child abuse and adult victimization, and mental health issues are predictive of recidivism and institutional misconducts for women offenders (Van Voorhis, Salisbury, Wright, & Bauman, 2008). This raises the issue of whether programs that address gender-neutral risk factors are missing important components that are relevant to reducing the recidivism of women offenders. This evaluation has demonstrated that using a gender-responsive program, one that targets several gender-responsive risk factors, is effective in reducing recidivism.

Additionally, some feminist scholars have argued that cognitive behavioral programming is inappropriate for women offenders (Kendall & Pollack, 2003; Morash, 2009). Their disapproval of this treatment modality is best outlined in three criticisms. First, feminists assert that the individualized approach of cognitive behavioral therapy decontextualizes women offenders. That is, feminist philosophies focus on structural variables, such as poverty, sexism, racism, and oppression that are believed to contribute to female offending. Ignoring these structural variables removes important components that could be causes, or at least influences, on female offending. Cognitive behavioral therapy fails to recognize these contextual factors and the unique nature of women's pathways to crime (Morash, 2009). Second, feminists contend that most cognitive behavioral programs, research, and philosophies proclaiming their effectiveness have been generated by white, middle-class men. Specifically, Kendall (2002, 2004) objects to the notion that such programs or philosophies produced by these men can benefit women

because men cannot fully understand or appreciate the unique experiences women. Lastly, feminists argue the focus on “otherness” by these programs dehumanizes women. That is, cognitive behavioral therapy assumes that women offenders are somehow inherently different from law-abiding women in the way they think (Blanchette & Brown, 2006; Kendall & Pollack, 2003). While these criticisms are important to generate discourse around the issue of using cognitive behavioral interventions for women, little research has been found to support these concerns (Blanchette & Brown, 2006). Most of the arguments against cognitive behavioral therapy for women are philosophical and lack empirical evidence to support these claims. More importantly, the results from this study indicate that a cognitive behavioral program reduced the recidivism of women offenders. This empirical evidence may cause some to rethink their opposition to cognitive behavioral therapy for this population and the notion that these programs should not be limited to main stream risk factors.

As criminal justice agencies begin to turn more and more to the use of evidenced based practices to guide the choice of programs for their offender populations, this evaluation has particular importance. The results here indicate *Moving On* is an evidence based program. There are numerous merits to adopting and implementing evidence based programs. Utilizing an evidence based program increases the odds that the program will reduce reoffending and that the public good will be enhanced. There is also greater efficiency in using limited resources on what has been *proven* to work as compared to what people *think* will work or what has traditionally worked. Organizations can select from the growing number of evidence based programs, which are not only known to be effective but also often offer well-packaged program materials, staff training, and technical assistance. Using evidence based programs where appropriate can thus be viewed as a responsible and thoughtful use of limited resources. The findings from this study

indicate the *Moving On* program would be a good fit for agencies looking for an evidence based gender-responsive program.

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