Sorting Women's Risk: New Zealand Women Prisoners' Misconducts and Internal Security Risk

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Little research has focused on women prisoners' risk of violent or other serious behaviour problems during their period of incarceration, contributing to concerns that the existing male-based prisoner security classification systems used to manage such risk are not suitable for women prisoners. Examining institutional infractions (i.e., misconducts) is one way of investigating how well a security classification system is working. The present study describes New Zealand women prisoners' patterns of official institutional misconduct and their security classification statuses. Of the 886 New Zealand women imprisoned during the 12-month study period, less than 20% had one or more official misconducts. Only a small proportion of these acts were violent: 12% comprised assaults on others, or fighting between inmates. The majority of misconducts (72%) were categorised as disruptive or destructive behaviour, and another 15% involved alcohol or drugs. The overall rate of misconducts increased with higher security classification, but only minimum and low-medium security classification (the next highest) consistently differed in the expected direction for all categories of misconduct. The results were consistent with the few other studies that have investigated women prisoners' pattern of institutional misconducts by security classification status.

Keeping offenders safely, securely, and humanely locked up is a major purpose of prisons. Doing so cost efficiently is also paramount. A cornerstone of prisoner management is the security classification system: the process of determining the level of risk a prisoner poses to the public through potential escape, and within the institution through violence or other serious behaviour management problems. Security classification systems group together prisoners with similar risk of harm to the public and institution. For example, a prisoner's security classification determines the type of facility or unit where she is placed, the number of prison officers per prisoner required for various activities, the degree of restriction of movement within a unit and the wider institution, where prisoners can work and attend programmes, access to escorted or temporary releases, and so on. From prisoners' perspectives, security classification shapes how they are perceived by others, who they mix with, the range of work, rehabilitative and other opportunities they can access during their sentence, and ultimately the type of environment from which they return to the community (Brennan & Austin, 1997; Farr, 2000). For women prisoners, security classification also can determine contact with children; some jurisdictions provide enhanced visiting options and specific programmes for mothers and children at lower security levels (Australia & New Zealand Correctional Services Administrators' Forum, 2001; Carlson, 2001; Rist, 1997). In short, security classification shapes prison management and prisoners' lives.

In New Zealand, as in most Western jurisdictions, security classification systems were developed first with male prisoners and then applied to women. The adoption of male-based security classification systems in women's prisons has usually occurred without prior cross-validation with women prisoners. The question of whether these male-based systems work well with women prisoners has become of significant concern across jurisdictions. In particular, male-based security classification systems are thought to over-classify women (i.e., to over-estimate women's risk and allocate them to higher security than is necessary; see Austin, 2003; Austin, Hardyman, & Brown, 2001; Burke & Adams, 1991; Farr, 2000; Hardyman, Austin, & Tullock, 2002; Rist, 1997; Van Voorhis & Presser, 2001).

Institutional rule violations or misconducts are a measure of the risk a

prisoner poses within an institution. There are a variety of rules about how prisoners must behave while in prison. Some rules forbid activities that are also illegal in the community (e.g., assaults, drug possession), while others concern the orderly operation of an institution (e.g., refusing to obey an order, leaving work without permission). Prisoners who are caught by staff breaking such rules can be charged and convicted of misconduct, and subjected to various punishments. Thus misconduct behaviour can be seen as a type of intra-prison criminal behaviour and an indication of the risk a prisoner poses within an institution, just as criminal behaviour in the community can be seen as a measure of the risk an offender poses to the community.

As a preliminary step to investigating the suitability of New Zealand's security classification system with women prisoners, in this paper we describe women prisoners' institutional misconducts and their distribution by security classification. We begin with a brief overview of studies that have sought to validate security classification of women prisoners and method-ological issues inherent in validation.

Security classification systems and women prisoners

A key principle of security classi-fication is that prisoners should be managed at the *least restrictive* level of security appropriate to the level of risk they pose. In calculating this level of risk, objective point-based security classification systems have replaced subjective systems as the dominant model. Objective systems use well-defined legal, personal, or behavioural criteria in a weighted-item classification instrument or scale. The total score on the instrument determines security classification. Professional judgement and discretion can be used to override the objective score, but such overriding should be exceptional (Alexander & Austin, 1992; Clements, 1996).

Security classification systems aim to manage two kinds of risk. The term *internal security risk* is commonly used to refer to risk of violence or other serious behavioural problems that threaten security within an institution. In contrast, the term *external security*

risk refers to the risk of escape and harm to the public. In the sample for the present study, the rate of escape was extremely low[1], so our focus here is on internal security risk only.

Existing literature emphasises the importance of ensuring that security classification systems are well designed, implemented, and evaluated (e.g., Alexander & Austin, 1992; Austin, 1986, 2003). One goal of evaluation is to assess the system's validity. A valid classification tool will correctly identify which prisoners are at greater risk of serious behavioural management problems, and a valid management system will appropriately place and manage prisoners to inhibit or contain their level of risk (Berecochea & Gibbs, 1991).

Several jurisdictions have recently investigated the validity of their women prisoners' security classification systems (Austin et al., 2001; Harer & Langan, 2001; Luciani, Motuik, & Nafekh, 1996; Van Voorhis & Presser, 2001). In the largest study, Harer and Langan (2001) investigated the predictive validity of the US Federal Bureau of Prisons' initial risk classification instrument with women's and men's violent misconducts in prison. The sample was newly admitted prisoners to federal prisons between 1991 and 1998, and included over 24,000 women and 170,000 men. Harer and Langan found that women prisoners had lower rates of all violent misconducts compared to men, which was most pronounced for *serious* violent misconducts (i.e., killing or attempted killing, serious assault, and weapon possession; versus fighting, threatening bodily harm, and minor assault). Only 2.8% of all women prisoners' violent misconducts were judged serious, compared with 18.5% for men. Harer and Langan concluded that women prisoners' rate and serious-ness of violence was substantially less than men's. Harer and Langan also investigated the relationship between classification items and misconducts, and concluded that their study provided empirical evidence that the security classification instrument could predict institutional violent misconducts (i.e., that the instrument was valid in this respect). However, Harer and Langan

also concluded that the differences in seriousness of violence committed by men and women indicated that the tool was over-estimating women's risk of serious violence within the institution relative to men.

Luciani et al. (1996) evaluated the Correctional Services of Canada (CSC) security classification system, primarily with men but with a small cross-validation sample of women prisoners ($n=65$). In contrast to Harer and Langan (2001) who investigated the predictive validity of the objective score, Luciani et al. investigated the relationship between the security classification designation (i.e., the result of the use of the security classification tool) and the proportion of women who committed an institutional incident. They found the proportion of women committing an institutional incident increased with higher levels of security classification: 5% (1 inmate) of minimum security women, 26% (10 inmates) of medium security women, and 100% (4 inmates) of maximum security women had an institutional incident. For the 6679 men, Luciani et al. found a similar pattern of increasing percentages of incidents with increasing security: 16% of minimum security men, 35% of medium security men, and 50% of maximum security men had an institutional incident. Luciani et al. took the higher proportion of prisoners committing incidents at higher security as evidence that the classification system was sorting prisoners appropriately.

Finally, a series of reports document various US correctional agencies' efforts to evaluate and improve their security classification systems for women prisoners (e.g., Burke & Adams, 1991; Hardyman et al., 2002; Van Voorhis & Presser, 2001). These authors commonly reported that male-based security classification systems were perceived as over-classifying women prisoners; that is, management and staff believed that the system was classifying women to higher security classifications than was necessary to manage their security risk. Consequently, jurisdictions reduced the security level of some women, thus increasing the number of women being managed at lower security. For

example, Van Voorhis and Presser's (2001) review of US Federal Prisons found that many states did not use security classification to separate women offenders inside the institutions. In other words, women with varying levels of internal security risk were managed together at a uniformly low security level without any increase in institutional rule violation or security breaches. Again, such a finding supports the perception that adopting male-based security classification systems in women's prisons leads to the over-estimation of women's internal security risk and therefore their over-classification to higher security than is necessary.

Methodological issues in empirically evaluating the validity of security classification tools

Two key assumptions inherent in security classification systems have relevance to their validation. First, security classification systems assume that prisoners vary in their internal security risk and that measurable prisoner characteristics predict that variation. Second, security classification assumes that greater physical security, restriction, and supervision will suppress internal security risk. Hence, behavioural incidents exhibited by a prisoner at any level of security classification will reflect a combination of their internal security risk and the level of environmental suppression assumed to be operating. In operational terms, internal security risk is measured by institutional misconduct. For a particular tool to be valid, researchers need to demonstrate that it is correctly identifying different levels of risk in prisoners (i.e., that it is identifying the likelihood that offenders will commit misconducts).

Researchers seeking to validate security classification systems have argued that two different patterns of results can indicate that the system is valid. The first pattern is where the rate of misconduct increases with higher security classification. Here it is assumed that increasing misconducts demonstrate that the tool is correctly identifying prisoners exhibiting higher internal security risk, and they are being put into higher security environments

(e.g., Harer & Langan, 2001). However, the suppressing effects of these environments are not fully "cancelling out" the increased risk of these higher security classified prisoners.

The second trend that researchers have interpreted as indicating that a classification tool is valid is where the rate of misconduct remains equivalent at all levels of security. For this pattern, it would be assumed that the tool is correctly identifying prisoners with higher internal security risk, who are then placed in higher security environments. However, higher security is now fully suppressing the increased risk. Therefore, using rates of misconduct, a classification tool is only considered invalid if higher security prisoners commit less misconducts than those at lower levels of security. Then the tool is thought to be under-classifying high risk prisoners or over-classifying low risk prisoners, or both. Otherwise, researchers assume that the system is valid (see Alexander & Austin, 1992; Berecochea & Gibbs, 1991 for full discussion of these issues).

Why use such a clumsy and dubious method of validation? The best method for validating a classification tool would be to randomly allocate prisoners with equivalent levels of assessed risk to different levels of placement security. However, such a design is never operationally possible because of the dangers it poses to prisoners, staff, and the community. Therefore, in practice assessed security level will almost always covary with the level of security provided by that prisoner's placement. So it is almost impossible to determine if a prisoner is correctly classified or over-classified (Berecochea & Gibbs, 1991). For example, when a prisoner commits no misconduct is this because her internal security risk is well managed (i.e., suppressed) by the level of security, or because her internal security risk is low and she could be appropriately managed at lower security? Thus the only obvious "mistakes" in classification occur when a prisoner has a high rate of misconduct. Then we can reasonably assume that she should be in a more controlling environment.

Relatedly, the assumption that higher security suppresses internal

security risk, and therefore suppresses the rate and seriousness of misconduct, has not been empirically evaluated. Furthermore, the idea that misconduct rates result simply from the interaction of prisoner risk with uniform environmental suppression is overly simplistic. Gendreau, Goggin, and Law's (1997) meta-analysis of the predictors of prison misconducts found that a number of dynamic institutional factors, including population demographics, per diem cost, and inmate turnover, ranked as better predictors of misconducts than prisoner characteristics. Prison architectural design and prison management style are also held anecdotally to influence prisoner behaviour (Austin, 2003). Greater restrictions at higher security usually also translate to fewer opportunities to undertake programmes and other constructive activities that may reduce the risk of misconduct. Lastly, at higher security greater inmate visibility, staffing supervision levels, and officer vigilance may result in more misconducts being detected and recorded. Therefore, although the risk management component of security classification is intended to suppress prisoner internal security risk, other situational or environmental factors may exacerbate prisoner risk, or at least the recording of that risk.

In conclusion, the risk of a prisoner committing misconduct comprises a range of individual and environmental variables and their interactions. Environmental influences are not equal at all facilities, even those with the same security designation. Untangling the effects on prisoner behaviour of prisoner characteristics, the environment, and prisoner-environment interactions is very difficult (Alexander & Austin, 1992), and has not yet been done in research investigating the predictive validity of security classification systems. Few studies even report descriptive information about the prisons and management regimes for each level of security.

The present study

The New Zealand Department of Justice (now Corrections) introduced its current security classification system in 1992. It comprises an objective scale that scores prisoners on their external and

internal security risk, four security classification designations, and a set of management policies and facilities for each classification level. The system is similar to the US Federal Bureau of Prisons' model. The system was piloted with male prisoners and subsequently implemented in both men's and women's prisons. A number of performance indicators are regularly monitored within the New Zealand Department of Corrections, including officers' compliance with the scoring criteria and processes outlined in the security classification manual, the distribution of security classifications, and the number of escapes and serious assaults committed each year. However, the validity of the security classification instrument items and the assigned classification categories has not been investigated for either men or women prisoners.

The present study was part of a larger project focusing on the suitability of the existing security classification system with women prisoners. The first aim of the present study was to describe the internal security risk posed by women prisoners in the form of recorded misconducts. The second aim was to describe how that risk was distributed by security classification designation (i.e., by the final security classification outcome rather than by the security classification instrument total or item scores).

Procedure

Sample

The sample was all NZ women prisoners who began or were already serving a prison sentence during the study period between 1 July 2000 and 30 June 2001. The prisoners were serving sentences in one of the three women's prisons in New Zealand. All three women's prisons had facilities to accommodate minimum, low-medium, and high-medium security classified prisoners, but maximum security classified prisoners were only accommodated at one prison.

The total sample comprised 886 women; 579 were serving a sentence that began during the study period and 307 were serving a sentence that began prior to the study period. The average *daily* number of women in prison during the study period was 300. Their average age was 30.5 years ($SD=9.3$). By ethnicity, 57% were Māori, 31% were European or Pakeha, and 6% were from another Pacific nation. The mean sentence length was 537 days ($SD=630$), excluding the 17 women on life sentences for murder. Sentence length refers to the maximum number of days that the woman will serve in custody for all current sentences combined, once any days she spent in custody on remand are deducted.

Variables

Misconducts - Misconduct reports are disciplinary offences defined in the New Zealand Penal Institutions Act 1954. The outcome of prison misconduct hearings is recorded in the prison's misconduct logbook. Misconduct reports were extracted manually by the first author from the three prison logbooks for the study period. The logbook recorded the inmate name, date the misconduct was committed, a brief statement about the misconduct (e.g., Smith hit Walsh), inmate plea, outcome of the misconduct hearing, and any penalty imposed. Allegations that did not result in conviction were excluded.

Security classification - Prisoners' security classifications were obtained from the Department of Corrections' computer records. Each classification was matched to the date that each misconduct was committed.

Every prisoner with a sentence of three months or more is assigned an *initial* security classification at the beginning of her sentence. *Review* security classifications occur every six months or in response to an event indicating a significant increase in risk, such as fighting between prisoners. Review classifications use the same items as for initial classifications, with the addition of four items concerning behaviour in the institution since last classification and one item concerning the amount of time left to serve. Thus in review classifications, prisoners' initial security score totals can increase, decrease, or remain unchanged depending on their recent behaviour and how much of the sentence remains to be served. For example, prisoners who are cooperating with staff and living within the prison rules are likely to have their security classification reduced on review, whereas prisoners who are uncooperative and have misconducts are likely to remain at the same security classification or have their security classification increased.

The security classification process is initially completed by a prison officer, and then reviewed by an authorised senior prison officer. Final security classification approval is by the prison site manager, and in rare instances by authorised prison staff at the Department's national headquarters.

Table 1 shows the initial and review security classification items. For each offender, the score on each item is combined to give a total security classification score. Each security classification designation corresponds to a range of total scores. From lowest to highest, prisoners can be assigned a minimum (total score = 0 to 8), low-medium (total score = 9 to 13), high-medium (total score = 14 to 19), and maximum (total score = 20 or more) security classification.

Where prison staff believe that the objective score incorrectly classifies a prisoner, the staff member can recommend that the objective score is overridden and that the prisoner is placed at a higher or lower security classification. During the study period 70 security classifications involved prison staff overriding the objective security classification score and placing the prisoner at a higher or lower security classification than the objective score recommended. This equated to professional override being used in 11.5% of all security classifications conducted in the study period, which is within the range expected when using objective security classification systems (Alexander & Austin, 1992).

Results

Institutional misconducts

During the study period, 152 women (17% of the total sample) committed 481 misconducts. The number of misconducts per prisoner ranged from 0 to 22: 83% had none, 10% had 1 or 2, and 7% had 3 or more. Table 2 shows the distribution of misconducts by category. Disorderly behaviour and disobeying rules accounted for about

40% of the misconducts, while alcohol and drug offences accounted for 15%, and assaults 12%. The assaults category contained six assaults against an officer (1.2% of all misconducts), 38 against another inmate (7.9% of all misconducts), and 15 for fighting (3.1% of all misconducts). None of the assaults against prison officers were defined as serious, where a serious assault involves injury to the victim requiring medical attention or follow-up over a 24 hour period or longer. Whether any assaults between prisoners were serious was not specifically recorded, although none were referred to as serious in the logbooks. There was one misconduct record that referred to a prisoner having a weapon in her possession; in this case a knife.

Women who committed misconduct(s) were compared to those who did not on age, sentence length, and major offence. Those with misconducts were significantly younger ($M = 26.5$ years, $SD = 7.3$ years) than women who did not have a misconduct ($M = 31.3$ years, $SD = 9.5$ years); $t(234) = 6.6$, $p<.01$, $d=.56$. Women with misconducts were serving significantly longer sentences ($M = 920$ days, $SD = 879$ days,) than women without misconducts ($M = 463$ days, $SD = 539$ days), $t(164) = 6.0$, $p = <.01$, $d=.63$.

The main offence leading to imprisonment for women with and without misconduct is shown in Table 3. To calculate whether differences in the proportion of major offences for each group were significant, chi-squared analyses were conducted. Women prisoners with misconducts were significantly more likely to be in prison for serious violence than women without a misconduct, $X^2(1, N = 903) = 68.7$, $p = .00$. Women prisoners with misconducts were also significantly *less likely* to have a current main offence that involved either driving offending, $X^2(1, N= 903) = 13.4, p <.01$, or administration of justice offending (e.g., breach of sentence), $X^2(1, N = 903) = 7.76$, $p = .05$. There were no other statistically significant differences in main offence type by misconduct status.

Level of security and institutional misconducts

The proportion of misconducts committed by prisoners at each security classification varied: 29% of all misconducts were committed by women classified as a minimum security risk, 37% by low-medium women, 25% by high-medium women, and 3% by women classified as maximum security. Unclassified prisoners accounted for 6% of all misconducts. In contrast, the average daily distribution of women across each security classification during the same period was: 57% minimum, 23% low-medium, 10% high-medium, and 2% maximum security classification, as well as 8% unclassified.

In order to investigate misconducts further, we collapsed the range of infractions listed in Table 2 into 3 categories. We retained the assault and alcohol/drug misconduct categories and combined all of the other types into a new category: disruptive/destructive misconducts. To facilitate comparison of the numbers of misconducts committed across security levels when there were variable numbers of prisoners at each level, we calculated the misconduct rate per 100 prisoners held at each security classification level for the study period. Table 4 shows this rate by security classification, with 95% confidence intervals in parentheses (National Centre for Health Statistics, 1998). Thus, for every 100 women prisoners held at minimum security for the year, there were 89.7 misconducts; 11.7 assaults, 19.8 alcohol or drug related misconducts, and 58 disruptive or destructive misconducts. For all types of misconduct, the rates for unclassified and maximum inmates did not differ significantly from those at other levels of security (p>.05). Rates at minimum security were significantly

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Table 1. Items in New Zealand Department of Corrections' initial and review security classification instruments

Initial items (scoring range)	Additional review items[c] (scoring range)
Seriousness of offence[a] (0 – 7) 0 = *lowest (e.g., shoplifts)* 7 = *highest (e.g., wounding with intent)*	Time left to serve (2 – 4) 2 = *more than 5 years* 4 = *less than 1 year*
Length of sentence (0 – 7) 0 = *1 year or less* 7 = *7 years or more*	Mental/psychological stability (2 or 4) 2 = *unstable* 4 = *stable*
Eligibility for parole (-1 or 0) -1 = *eligible for parole*[b] 0 = *not eligible for parole*	Cooperation with prison staff (2 – 6) 2 = *poor* 6 = *good*
Mental health history (0 – 5) 0 = *none* 5 = *mental health problems in last 5 years*	Misconduct/incident reports (2 – 6) 2 = *1 or more serious reports (e.g., assault)* 6 = *no reports*
History of escape/attempted escapes (0 – 7) 0 = *no escapes* 7 = *attempts or escapes in last 2 years, from a secure facility, or involving violence*	Motivation (2 – 6) 2 = *poor* 6 = *good*
History of violence (0 – 7): 0 = *no history of previous violence* 7 = *committed previous acts of serious violence in the last 2 years*	
Further charges pending (0 – 5) 0 = *none* 5 = *serious charges pending (e.g., robbery)*	

[a] Seriousness of offence scores are based on the average length of custodial sentence given by the courts for this offence.

[b] Under the sentencing legislation in force during the study period only some sentences included eligibility for parole.

[c] Review item scores, once totalled, are transformed into an *adjustment score*, which ranges from –8 to +7. The final review security classification score can thus increase, decrease or remain the same because it is calculated by adding the adjustment score to the total score for the initial items.

Table 2. Distribution of misconducts by category

Misconduct Category: *examples*	%
Disorderly behaviour: *abusive gestures/language, threats, verbal altercation, obstruct an officer*	22.6
Disobeys rule/order: *leaves work or cell without permission, disobeys order*	16.4
Alcohol/drug: *uses alcohol/drug, has utensils, refuses drug test, homebrew*	15.4
Damage property: *own, institution, other inmates, graffiti*	12.7
Assaults: *assaults officers or other prisoner, fighting*	12.3
Unapproved article: *in cell or on person, trying to give an article to an inmate/visitor*	11.5
Other offences against good order: *nuisance, tattooing, unapproved contact*	8.7
Missing	0.6
Total	100.0

Table 3. Distribution of major offence for women with and without misconduct

Major Offence	Misconduct (%)	No misconduct (%)
Serious violence[a]	32.2	8.0***
Property	19.1	14.7
Dishonesty	16.4	20.1
Violence	12.5	13.0
Drug	9.9	16.3
Driving	2.0	12.4***
Administration of justice	2.6	10.1*
Kidnaps/Abducts	2.0	0.4
Arson	1.3	1.9
Sex offences	0.7	0.9
Other	0.7	1.9
Missing	0.7	0.5
Total	100	100

[a] Includes serious sexual and non-sexual violent offences defined in the Criminal Justice Act 1985, and murder.
* $p<.05$ *** $p<.001$

proportion of women at each security classification who committed misconduct(s). To calculate if the differences in proportion by security classification were significant chi-squared analyses were conducted. We focused on differences between the three most common security classifications – minimum, low-medium, and high-medium – because the number of women spending any time in maximum security classification (N=10) was too small for analysis, and unclassified prisoners serve such short sentences that the opportunity to commit misconducts is restricted.

For all misconduct categories, the proportion of women who committed misconducts at minimum security was significantly smaller than the proportion of women who committed misconducts at low-medium: assaults, $X^2(1, N=785) = 8.4$, $p<.01$; alcohol/drug, $X^2(1, N=785)= 10.1$, $p<.01$; disruptive/destructive, $X^2(1, N=785) = 27.6, p<.01$; and any misconduct, $X^2(1, N=785) = 24.7, p<.01$. The proportion of women who committed assault or any misconduct at low-medium security classification was significantly lower than the proportion at high-medium security classification: assaults, $X^2(1, N=266) = 3.9$, $p = .05$; and any misconduct, $X^2(1, N=266) = 6.2, p=.01$. There was no significant difference in the proportion of low-medium and high-medium security classified women

lower than at low-medium for all misconduct categories (p<.05). Minimum security also was significantly lower than high-medium for all types (*p*<.05) except alcohol and drug misconducts. The rates of disruptive/destructive and the total misconduct were significantly lower at low-medium than high-medium (*p*<.05). There were no other differences. In no case was a misconduct rate found to be significantly lower at a higher level of security.

So far the analyses tell us about the type and rate of misconducts at each security classification, and not about the proportion of women at each classification who did or did not commit misconduct. Table 5 shows the

Table 4. Rate of misconduct by security classification per 100 women prisoners (95% CI)[a]

Security classification[a]	Assault	Alcohol/drug	Disruptive/ Destructive	Total
Unclassified	19.7	9.8	108.2	137.7
	(5-51)	(1-36)	(68-164)	(92-199)
Minimum	11.7 [b]	19.8[d]	58.0 [f]	89.7[j]
	(7-19)	(13-28)	(47-71)	(75-105)
Low-medium	34.3 [c]	52.2[e]	204.0[g]	290.6[k]
	(21-52)	(36-74)	(168-240)	(248-333)
High-medium	47.6 [c]	29.3	362.2[h]	439.1[m]
	(25-81)	(13-58)	(294-441)	(364-518)
Maximum	64.2	42.8	235.6	342.6
	(13-188)	(5-155)	(118-421)	(196-556)

[a] The rate per 100 prisoners is based on an average number of prisoners at each security classification for the study period.
[b] Differing superscripts indicate significant differences at *p*<.05

who committed alcohol/drug, $X^2(1, N = 266) = .05$, $p = .82$, or disruptive/destructive misconducts, $X^2(1, N=263) = 2.8$, $p = .09$. However, in the case of alcohol/drug and disruptive/destructive misconducts there was a significant difference between high-medium and minimum security classification: alcohol/drug, $X^2(1, N = 643) = 6.8$, $p=.01$, and disruptive/destructive misconducts, $X^2(1, N=640) = 35.0$, $p = .00$.

In summary, the proportion of women who committed all types of misconduct at minimum security was significantly lower than the proportion at low-medium or high-medium security classification. The proportion of women who committed any misconduct or assault misconduct at low-medium security classification was lower than at high-medium security classification, but low- and high-medium did not differ in alcohol/drug or disruptive/destructive misconducts.

Discussion

The first aim of the study was to describe the internal security risk posed by women prisoners as captured by official prisoner misconduct reports. Over a 12-month period, our results showed that less than one-fifth of all incarcerated women had any type of misconduct. Of those women who did most had only one or two misconducts. About three-quarters of all misconduct involved offences that we termed disruptive or disorderly behaviour, such as offensive gestures, verbal altercations, abusive language, disobeying an order, or having an unapproved article. Only a small proportion of women's misconduct involved assault to staff or prisoners, or fighting between prisoners, and the records suggested such violence was at the less serious end of the spectrum. Another small proportion of women's misconducts were alcohol- or drug-related. Overall, our findings indicated most women didn't commit misconduct and, where they did, it typically did not involve violence. Only a small proportion of women committed multiple or serious misconducts, and hence reflected a high level of internal security risk.

On average, women who committed misconducts were younger,

Table 5. Proportion of women prisoners with misconducts at each security classification

Security Classification	Assault	Alcohol/drug	Disruptive/destructive	Any
Unclassified	1%	0%	5%	5%
Minimum	1%[a]	4%[d]	9%[f]	11%[h]
Low-medium	7%[b]	11%[e]	24%[g]	26%[j]
High-medium	16%[c]	13%[e]	36%[g]	44%[k]
Maximum	36%	9%	64%	64%
Missing	0%	5%	6%	0.2%
Total	4%	6%	14%	16%

[a] Differing superscripts indicate significant differences at $p<.05$

more likely to be in prison for a violent offence, and serving a longer sentence than those who did not. Age is not a variable used in the security classification instrument, so the age difference is not simply a result of younger prisoners being classified to higher security. However, the finding is in accord with international research that consistently shows younger age to be a risk factor for institutional misconducts (e.g., Berecochea & Gibbs, 1991; Gendreau et al., 1997; Harer & Langan, 2001). Offence seriousness and sentence length are both items built into the security classification instrument, so their association with misconduct is consistent with higher security classified prisoners having higher rates of misconduct.

The second aim was to describe how misconducts varied by security classification status. Recall that in the introduction, it was argued that misconducts can really only indicate over-classification of prisoners (i.e., overestimation of the necessary security level), when the rate of misconducts decreases as security classification increases. This pattern indicates the system is invalid.

We found all three types of misconduct occurred at every level of security. The overall rate of misconduct increased with the level of security classification, consistent with Harer and Langan (2001). The overall proportion of prisoners with misconducts increased with the level of security classification, consistent with Luciani et al. (1996). Although the rate and proportion of women committing each type of misconduct was consistently lower at

minimum than low-medium security classification, there were fewer differences between low-medium and high-medium security classification. There were no instances in which there was a lower rate of misconduct or a lower proportion of prisoners committing misconducts at a higher security level. Therefore, using the criteria of these other studies, this study offers no evidence that the resulting security classification designations were invalid or consistently under-classifying high-risk women prisoners

What might have accounted for the pattern of misconducts found here? In all three New Zealand women's prisons included in the study, minimum and low-medium security classified prisoners were housed in separate but otherwise very similar units. Inmates with either of the two security classifications were able to mix together during the day for work or programmes, although the national alcohol and drug residential therapeutic programme was only available to minimum security prisoners. Given the physical environment and internal management regimes were similar, low-medium security placement would be hypothesised to have little additional suppressing effect on prisoner behaviour compared to minimum security. This observation suggests that the higher rate and proportion of prisoners committing misconduct at low-medium security classification was due to prisoners' higher internal security risk.

In contrast to those with minimum and low-medium classifications, high-medium and maximum security

classified prisoners were housed in separate, smaller, and more restrictive units, and were not allowed to mix with low security prisoners during the day for any reason. High security prisoners' access to work and programmes was restricted to those offered within their units, and therefore was significantly less than low security classifications. In short, the high security environment differed markedly from the low security environment. The suppressing effect of high security would therefore be hypothesised to be greater than low security because of the greater staff supervision and greater incentives for prisoners to regulate their behaviour in order to be reclassified to a lower level. Yet we have also noted that features of this restrictive environment may exacerbate problematic behaviour in prisoners. For example, boredom from lack of interesting or constructive activities, or hostility exacerbated by feelings of powerlessness, may in fact increase internal security risk. An analysis such as we present here cannot begin to account for the influence of these dynamic factors on women's internal security risk.

Equally interesting and important is the observation that most women classified as high-medium security risk did not commit assault or alcohol and drug related misconduct. Over half did not commit any misconduct, nor did three-quarters of those at low-medium security. Are these women over-classified? Put another way, would they commit more, or more serious, misconducts than their peers if they were managed at low-medium security classification? Because minimum security classification is the least secure or restrictive environment under which a prisoner is held, the rate of misconduct at minimum security can be thought of as a kind of misconduct *base-rate*: the level of misconduct that can be tolerated by the system without reclassifying inmates upwards. Yet as noted, all types of misconduct occurred even at this classification. So there is no evidence here that higher security inmates commit more serious acts. And although the rates and proportions do generally increase with security placement, nevertheless there remains a high false positive rate, which leaves

much scope for improved prediction. Thus, our study suggests that many women may be classified to higher security than is necessary to manage their low level of internal security risk.

The current study was a preliminary investigation of New Zealand women prisoners' internal security risk. The study sought to provide a description of women's pattern of misconducts by security classification. Determining the suitability or performance of the security classification system requires further research to identify meaningful comparisons, both over time and with male prisoners, so that the parameters of optimal security system performance can be more clearly defined. For example, over at least the last eight years there has been a steady decrease in the proportion of women prisoners classified to minimum security and an increase in women classified to high security (Department of Corrections, 2003; Lash, 1998; Rich, 2000). Is this increase occurring because women coming to prison today present greater security risk, or because changes in sentencing caused by political factors indirectly influence the scores women obtain on the classification items? Comparing the impact of the changes in security classification distribution on women's misconducts may provide an opportunity to assess the impact of prison environment on the rate and tendency to commit misconducts.

Comparison with men's misconducts is also important in future research (Tischler & Marquart, 1989). Although we found some evidence that higher security classification reflected higher risk prisoners, we need to examine women's rate and proportion of misconduct relative to men, as they have been in some other jurisdictions, to determine if the system is consistently predicting and managing risk between women and men. For example, do high security women present the same type of internal security risk as high security men?

Lastly, the study did not investigate the predictive relationships between items or the total score on the security classification instrument, and security classification or misconduct. Future research avenues include measuring the contribution of the items to the resulting

security classification to determine which factors *drive* classification, and conducting multivariate analyses to measure the strength of the relationship between items, security classification, and misconduct. Future research should also consider factors that interact with prisoner adjustment such as time served or time spent at each classification level (Casey-Acevedo & Bakken, 2001), and potentially, the inclusion of richer sources of information than official records, such as self-report measures of behaviour, attitudes, and perceptions would greatly enrich this embryonic research field.

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Note
1. Official records indicated one women prisoner committed a walkaway escape during the 12-month study period.

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