Effective Gender-Responsive Interventions in Juvenile Justice: Addressing the Lives of Delinquent Girls

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After being overlooked for years, girls and young women are no longer invisible in the juvenile justice system.   One explanation for the recent focus on juvenile females may be that they are the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice population (OJJDP, 2000a). Girls' arrests have outpaced those of boys for most of the last decade. For example, between 1989 and 1998, girls' arrests increased 50% compared to 17% for boys (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1999). Over the past twenty years, there has been a marked increase in the number of girls and young women arrested, detained, and incarcerated in juvenile and adult facilities.

Although media attention to female juvenile crime has increased over the past decade - mostly around sensationalized issues such as "girls and gangs" - the research on issues, policy and programs for at-risk adolescent females has, for the most part, been ignored. Attempts to understand delinquent behavior have included few adolescent females in research studies. Much of the research on the differences between male and female adolescents focuses on developmental issues. However, gender, race, and socioeconomic status also influence adolescent development. Girls and young women confront additional problems unique to their gender such as sexual abuse, battering, teenage pregnancy, single parenthood, and disparity in educational, vocational, and employment opportunities.

This paper addresses the gendered differences in girls' pathways into delinquency, their offense patterns, and their behavior and needs while in the juvenile justice system. Specifically, we argue that the system was designed to deal with delinquent boys and has neglected the gender-specific program and treatment needs of girls. Finally, we propose a framework for

designing a continuum of care for girls, which includes effective gender-responsive prevention and intervention approaches.

Trends in Girl's Offending

Although girls remain a small proportion of the juvenile justice population, arrest, detention and custody data show an increase in both the number and percentage of girls in the juvenile justice system. This trend runs counter to that of boys. Law enforcement agencies reported 670,800 arrests of females under the age of 18 in 1999--accounting for 27% of the total juvenile arrests made that year. Between 1990 and 1999, arrests of girls increased more (or decreased less) than male arrests in most offense categories (OJJDP, 2000b). Delinquency cases involving girls rose 83% between 1988 and 1997 increasing across all racial groups: white, 74%, African American, 106%, and other races, 102% (American Bar Association and National Bar Association, 2001).

Girls accounted for 22% of juvenile arrests for aggravated assault and 30% for simple assaults. They represented 36% of arrests for larceny-theft, much of which, particularly for girls is shoplifting. They accounted for more than half (59%) of all juveniles arrested for running away from home. Thirty percent of curfew arrests involved girls. The increase in the number of drug abuse violation arrests between 1990 and 1999 was greater for female juveniles (190%) than for male juveniles (124%) (OJJDP, 2000b).

Researchers suggest that the increase in girls' delinquency is not necessarily due to a significant rise in violent behavior, but to the re-labeling of girls' conflicts as violent offenses (Chesney-Lind & Okamoto, 2001). A summary of two studies on self-reported aggression reflects that while about a third of the girls reported being in a physical fight in the last year, this was true of over half of the boys in both samples. Girls are more likely to fight with a parent or sibling (34% compared to 9%), whereas boys are more likely to fight with friends or strangers (Girls, Incorporated, 1996). Girls are less likely than their male counterparts to engage in serious, violent crime and more likely to be involved in nonviolent property and drug offenses. Status offenses, which include running away, underage drinking, truancy, and curfew violations, continue to be a key factor in female delinquency (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1998).

Profiling Delinquent Girls

Recent attention is being devoted to the unique issues of female delinquency, the nature and causes of girls' involvement in crime, and the developmental issues that are particular to girls and young women. The ways in which girls develop their identity and relationships with others have begun to influence delinquency theory and practice. There is an evolving body of research documenting distinct gender differences in pathways to crime and a growing number of scholars have attempted to determine how males and females vary in terms of their paths to lawbreaking (Arnold 1995; Chesney-Lind & Rodriguez, 1983). Research data consistently point to a strong link between victimization, trauma and girls' delinquency (American Correctional Association, 1990; Belknap & Holsinger, 1998; Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1992). Research on child sexual abuse histories of juvenile and adult offenders suggests rates of sexual abuse are greater for girls than for boys (Dembo, Williams, & Schmeidler, 1993). Dembo et al. conducted research on female youth in detention and found that childhood abuse and neglect play a significant role in girls' involvement in the juvenile justice system, especially if the abuse occurs within the family.

Owen and Bloom (1997) in a study of girls and young women incarcerated in the California Youth Authority found that 66.7% of the young women reported ongoing physical abuse and 44.7% experienced sexual abuse. Often abuse in the home prompts girls to run away. Running away is one of the most prevalent risk factors for girl's involvement in the juvenile justice system and may ultimately lead to their incarceration. Arrest data indicate that girls and boys run away from home in about equal numbers but girls are arrested more often than boys (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1992).

Females - both adults and juveniles - involved in the criminal justice system share many of the same characteristics. Most are poor, undereducated, and unskilled and are disproportionately women and girls of color. Many come from impoverished urban environments, have been raised by single mothers, or have been in foster care placement. A profile of at-risk adolescent females identifies common characteristics including histories of victimization, unstable family life, school failure, repeated status offenses, and mental health and substance abuse problems.

These shared characteristics of at-risk adolescent females are identified as follows:
- Age 13 to 18 years
- History of victimization, especially physical, sexual, and emotional abuse
- Academic failure, truancy, and dropout
- Repeated status offenses, especially running away
- Unstable family life, including family involvement in the criminal justice system, lack of connectedness, social isolation
- History of unhealthy dependent relationships, especially with older males
- Mental health issues, including history of substance abuse
- Over-representation among communities of color

It is important to understand the context of girls' delinquency. Current findings on female delinquency confirm there are a number of similar correlates for delinquency between boys and girls; including lower socioeconomic status, disrupted family backgrounds, and difficulties in school. However, gender-specific differences among delinquents exist and have a significant impact on their treatment and management within the juvenile justice system. As mentioned, there is a growing body of research which documents that delinquent girls and young women have disproportionately high rates of victimization, particularly incest, rape and battering preceding their offending behavior (American Correctional Association, 1990; Belknap & Holsinger, 1998). The research suggests that prior victimization, offending (e.g., running away, prostitution, and drug law violations) and subsequent incarceration are interrelated (Arnold, 1990; Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1998; Owen & Bloom, 1998). Recent studies have identified running away from home and drug use as girls' means of coping with and surviving abuse in their homes.

The juvenile justice system's reaction to these differences has not been the development of gender-responsive policy and programming. The current system has been designed to deal with the problems of boys and young men and, in doing so, has neglected the gender-specific programming and treatment needs of girls and young women. Girls and young women respond differently than young males to program interventions and treatment. These differences in system response and individual reaction to treatment require separate research and planning to meet the needs of young females enmeshed in a system designed to manage and serve a predominately male population.

A 1998 California study found that while family issues (such as parental conflict, lack of family communication, and parents ill-equipped to deal with nurturing and supervising children) affect both males and females, there are multiple gender-specific dimensions associated with delinquency among girls and young women (Owen & Bloom, 1998). These specific dimensions include:

- Sexual, physical and emotional abuse are significant factors in producing risky and delinquent behavior among girls and young women. This effect is long-lasting and creates problems with running away, emotional adjustments, trust and secrecy, future sexuality and other risky behaviors.

- Substance abuse is often a sign of other problems that lead to risky behavior. There are few focused substance abuse programs for girls and young women that provide needed services ranging from prevention to residential care.

- Most female delinquents continue to commit relatively minor offenses. These offense patterns indicate a need for prevention and intervention programs rather than increased secure institutions. Gang involvement and fighting with peers contribute to delinquency for a small but significant number of girls and young women.

- Racial, ethnic, gender and economic discrimination may contribute to female delinquency through decreased opportunity, disparities in treatment, gender bias and lack of program parity.
- Girls and young women should be given special attention with prevention and education programs concerning reproductive health, pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Pregnant and parenting teens also need comprehensive health programs and services.

Processing of Girls in the Juvenile Justice System

As mentioned girls are disproportionately charged with status offenses. Their running away propels them into the juvenile justice system and may lead to incarceration as adults. In 1999, although girls constituted 27% of juvenile arrests, they accounted for 59% of juvenile arrests for running away and 54% of juvenile arrests for prostitution (OJJDP, 2000b).

In 1997, juvenile court judges waived 400 delinquency cases involving female offenders to adult court; this was 37% more than in 1988. Of the cases waived in 1997, 42% involved a person offense as the most serious charge, 41% involved a property offense, 8% involved a drug law violation, and 9% involved a public order offense (OJJDP, 2000a).

Between 1988 and 1997, the use of detention for girls increased 65% as compared with a 30% increase for boys. There is evidence that girls are being detained for less serious offenses than boys. Girls are more likely to be detained for minor offenses and for technical violations of probation or parole (OJJDP, 2000a).

A study of detention in several U.S. cities conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation found many more girls than boys are detained for minor offenses such as public disorder,

probation violation, status offenses and traffic offenses (29% girls versus 19% boys). Detained girls tend to have more status offenses and misdemeanors in their histories, rather than violent offenses (Sherman, in press).

African American girls make up nearly half of all those in secure detention and Latinas constitute 13%. Although whites constitute 65% of the population of at-risk girls, they account for only 34% of girls in secure detention. Seven of every 10 cases involving white girls are dismissed compared with 3 of every 10 cases for African American girls (Poe,Yamagata & Jones, 2000).

Programming for Girls

Girls entering the juvenile justice system often find themselves placed in programs that were created for delinquent boys. A study of 443 delinquency prevention program evaluations found that 35% of the programs served only males and 43% served primarily boys. Only 2% of delinquency programs served only girls and 6% served primarily girls (Lipsey, 1990). A review of promising programs described by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention referred to 24 programs specifically for boys and two programs for girls (Howell, 1995).

Nationally, there has been increased interest in identifying effective or promising practices that address the unique needs of at-risk girls. Despite this interest, very little is known about specific interventions or skills in working with girls. The "what works" literature has been focused primarily on boys and men and little is known about the applicability of these interventions for girls. Many of the published program evaluations describe the proportion of girls included in their sample; however, they fail to examine the difference in outcomes based on gender. While there are a few promising programs for girls, there is little literature on the effectiveness of various approaches (Greene, Peters, & Associates, 1998). Further, there are very few program evaluations that focus exclusively on girls. Little is known about how juvenile females respond to these approaches and many communities are unprepared to address the specific needs of girls who are involved or at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system. More information is needed regarding female development, the nature of female risk and protective factors, and the effectiveness of intervention and prevention programs so that juvenile justice policy makers and practitioners can provide gender-appropriate services to female adolescents.

There is also a paucity of research on the attitudes and experiences of professionals who work with girls. Among the research that does exist, it is noted that many individuals who work in the juvenile justice system maintain that girls are more difficult to work with than boys (Baines & Adler 1996; Belknap, Holsinger, & Dunn, 1997). Belknap et al. in a study of youth workers in Ohio found that most of the practitioners, unless they worked exclusively with girls, talked mostly about the male delinquents (Belknap, Dunn, & Holsinger, 1997).

Alder (1997) has noted that "willful" girls cause problems for a system that was created to handle boys and girls are deemed to be manipulative, hysterical, and verbally aggressive while boys are generally less trouble. Research also indicates that workers in the juvenile justice

system lack experience and knowledge about sexual abuse, which is disturbing because many delinquent girls experience this type of abuse (Baines & Adler, 1996).

Another study that was conducted in the State of Hawaii underscored the need for training in areas such as gender identity, female development, and cross-gender staff/client interactions. (Freitas & Chesney-Lind, 2001). Owen and Bloom (1997) found that California Youth Authority staff who worked with girls and young women believed that working with females required specialized training. They also felt that females needed more programming aimed at specific needs such as recreational, vocational, drug, and therapeutic programs.

Gender-Responsive Approaches

In the past twenty years the knowledge and understanding of women's lives have dramatically increased. This information has impacted and improved services for women and girls in the fields of health, mental health, substance abuse, and trauma treatment. Now there is both a need and an opportunity to bring the knowledge from other fields into the criminal justice system in order to develop effective programs that support successful outcomes for females. When the profile of girls offenders is compared to the profiles of adult women offenders, both in prison and in community corrections, it becomes clear that they are essentially the same females moving along the system from juvenile detention to jail or community corrections to state prison.

Based on the information about who the girls are, what their pathways to crime are, and how they differ from boys, the need for policy and programming that reflects these gender differences seems clear. In 1992, the U.S. Congress reauthorized the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974. This reauthorization provided for analysis, plan development, and fairness. However, parity and fairness do not mean copying males' programs and providing them to females. To be effective, such programs need to meet the specific needs of girls. In a 1997 report to the governor of Ohio on gender-specific services for adolescent girls, Belknap et al. (1997) wrote:

> When examining gender-specific programming, it is important to recognize *equality does not mean "sameness."* Equality is not about providing the same programs, treatment and opportunities for girls and boys….Equality is about providing opportunities that mean the same to each gender. This new definition legitimizes the differences between boy and girls. Programs for boys are more successful when they focus on rules, and offer ways to advance within a structured environment, while *programs for girls are more successful when they focus on relationships* with other people and offer ways to master their lives while keeping these relationships intact (pg. 23, emphasis added).

All that we know about the differences between the needs and strengths of girls and boys should to be considered in the design of gender-responsive programs. At the same time, we must be sure that gender-based services do not become sexist services. For example, the argument that girls need less funding for services because they are less dangerous to society should be challenged as sexist, just as acknowledging females' need for programs that address psychological trauma should not encourage a stereotype about girls' fragility. A publication from the new girls movement states that "To be fully effective for girls and boys, the design and operation of a program must consider gender--not in a manner that regards gender differences innate and unchangeable, but in a way that explores the social construction of gender and invites

young women and men to challenge gender norms, examine gender privilege, and create balance of power between girls and boys" (MS. Foundation for Women, 2001, pg. 6).

What are the key elements that need to be considered in creating programs that are gender-responsive? The definition we use for gender-responsive is: Creating an environment through site selection, staff selection, program development, content, and material that reflects an understanding of the realities of women's and girls lives and is responsive to their needs and strengths (Covington, 2001). This definition emphasizes two major aspects of program development: content and context. On one hand, for programming to be effective for girls, it needs to deal in a comprehensive and integrated way with the multiple issues that are impacting girls' lives. In addition, programming must take place in a environment that is conducive to a therapeutic change process. This is in contrast to what exists in many jurisdictions where girls are in a variety of program activities that are separate entities (designed for boys), lacking connection and congruence, and are provided in a chaotic and often unsafe environment. In order to design programs that reflect appropriate content and context for effective girls' services, it is important to have an understanding of girls' psychological development, as well as trauma treatment (Covington, 1999, 2000).

Jean Baker Miller posed the question of how women and girls grow and develop in her 1976 book *Toward a New Psychology of Women.* Traditional theories of psychology describe "development" as a climb from childlike dependence to mature independence, where the goal is to become a self-sufficient, clearly differentiated, autonomous self. In contrast, Miller said that a female's primary motivation is to build a sense of connection with others. According to Miller, a women or girl develops a sense of self and self-worth when her actions arise out of, and lead back into, connections with others--not one of independence or separation.

Previously, theoreticians had treated women's emphasis on connection as a sign of deficiency. In her book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Carol Gilligan (1982) observed:

> The disparity between women's experience and the representation of human development, noted throughout the psychological literature, generally has been seen to signify a problem in women's development. Instead, the failure of women to fit existing models of human growth may point to a problem in the representation, a limitation in the conception of the human condition, an omission of certain truths about life (pp. 1-2).

Miller's work led a group of researchers and practitioners to create the Stone Center at Wellesley College for the purpose of thinking through the qualities of relationships that foster healthy growth in women   The basic assumption of the Stone Center model is that "connection" is a basic human need, and that this need is especially strong in women. (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, and Surrey, 1991). The model shows that all people need both connection with others and differentiation from others, but that females are more attuned to connection, while males are more attuned to differentiation. Bylington (1997) explained this connection as follows:

> Theoretically, girls perceive themselves to be more similar than different to their earliest maternal caretakers, so they do not have to differentiate from their

mothers in order to continue to develop their identities. This is in contrast to boys, who must develop an identity that is different from the mother's in order to continue their development. Thus, women's psychological growth and development occurs through adding to rather than separating from relationships. Consequently, defining themselves as similar to others through relationships is fundamental to women's identities (p. 35).

A gender-responsive program based on relational theory creates an empowerment model which can reproduce five critical outcomes 1) increased zest and vitality, 2) empowerment to act, 3) knowledge of self and others, 4) a sense of self-worth, and 5) a desire for more connection (Miller, 1986). Gilligan's work with adolescent girls reflects a developmental process similar to what Miller found in adult women. Gilligan discovered that, because of their desire for connection, girls aged ten to thirteen tend to give up their sense of self and their own voices to be in relationship with and acceptable to boys (Gilligan, 1982).

In addition to developmental theory, an understanding of trauma theory is also important because the vast majority of girls have experienced physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. This has implications for both programming development and management strategies. The fundamental issue here is the provision of safety. Judith Herman's (1992) schema for trauma treatment focuses on three stages of recovery: safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection. The Safety phase includes self-care, as well as securing safety with self and others. The importance of safety is emphasized in *The New Girls' Movement: Implications for Youth Programs*, where "creating safe space" is considered the primary critical component of effective girls programming. Safe space is described in the following way:

> Safe space is girl-affirming and encourages girls' strong, healthy development. Safe space also fosters positive relationship among girls, young women and adult women and creates an environment of fun and joy. Programs create safe space also by providing girls with the option of keeping their secrets--no one demands disclosure and girls are free to make their own choices. In safe space, staff and girls assess their needs together and staff responds to girls' needs with respect and understanding. Staff and girls jointly develop programs based on what they learn together. It is from this place of security that girls begin to re-envision themselves and engage their families, institutions and communities in new and transforming ways (MS. Foundation for Women, 2001, pg. 14).

In addition to integrating relational and trauma theories as the foundation for program development, the following guiding principles for gender-responsive services are proposed:

1) Theoretical perspective/s are used that incorporate girls' pathways into the criminal justice system.
2) The programmatic approaches used are based on the theory/theories that fit the psychological and social needs of girls and reflect the realities of their lives (e.g. relational theory, trauma theory, substance abuse theory).
3) Program development is based on theories that are congruent, consistent and integrated.
4) Treatment and services are based on girls' competencies and strengths and promote self-reliance.

5) Programs use a variety of interventions--behavioral, cognitive, affective/dynamic and systems perspectives--in order to fully address the needs and strengths of girls.
6) Homogeneous groups are used, especially for primary treatment (e.g., trauma, substance abuse).
7) Services/treatment address girls' practical needs such as family, transportation, childcare, school, and vocational training and job placement.
8) There are opportunities to develop skills in a range of educational and vocational areas (inc. non-traditional vocational skills).
9) Staff reflects the client population in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and language (bi-lingual).
10) Female role models and mentors are crucial and reflect the racial/ethnicity and cultural backgrounds of the program participants.
11) Cultural awareness and sensitivity are promoted using the resources and strengths available in various communities.
12) Gender-responsive assessment tools and individualized treatment plans are utilized and match appropriate services with the identified needs/assets of each girl.

Conclusion

While there is some overlap between the life circumstances of male and female delinquents, these gender-based differences should be taken into consideration by researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. In terms of policies and programs, the juvenile justice system does not tend to identify and address the separate needs of girls and young women. Addressing the needs of delinquent girls requires specialized staffing and training, particularly in terms of relationship and communication skills, gender differences in delinquency, substance abuse education, the role of abuse, developmental stages of female adolescence, and available programs and appropriate placements.

Girls' pathways into delinquency can be articulated through further analysis and research, as well as the development and implementation of model programs incorporating gender-responsive approaches. Initiatives developed to address female delinquency should be based on the developmental, psychological, social, educational and cultural characteristics of this population.

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Juvenile delinquency is also known as teenage crime. It is like any crime that human beings commit but these crime differ becasue they are committed by young people. Before coming of age girls and boys have less understanding of the world. Parents, friends and teachers are all responsible along with the juvenile who commit a crime. This is why courts do not punish the teenagers like they punish the adults when they commit a crime. There are separate juvenile courts and the purpose of juvenile punishment is to help the teenager understand the importance of staying away from crimes. There are va Effective Gender-Responsive Interventions in Juvenile Justice: Addressing the Lives of Delinquent Girls. Article. Barbara Bloom. View. It is important to note that self-reports and other data sources indicate little, if any, actual increase in girls' delinquent behavior. Â Despite increased attention on girls' delinquency, evidence-based interventions have been largely lacking. We aim to (a) describe the design and implementation of a gender-specific program for juvenile justice-involved girls and (b) present prospective data on 3 cohorts of participants. Fifty-two girls were enrolled in the program, called the Girls Advocacy Project (GAP). Key risk and protective factors were identified based on existing literature and assessed.