

Moreland, N. M., Torres, D. J., Wagner, D., Estrada, M. (2006). Gender Specific Programming for Female Juvenile Offenders: Survey Results

Abstract

The current study had two main purposes. First, to investigate why our female population has remained constant or in some cases has increased in number of bookings, number of holds, average length of stay (ALOS), and average daily population (ADP) since juvenile reform efforts have begun. Second, why our females are not made eligible for alternative programming at the same rate as our male population? Survey results suggest that our female population is in need of alternative program services. Females who participated in the study overwhelmingly reported incidences of posttraumatic stress disorders (PTSD) and high incidences of early drug and alcohol use that was correlated with early sexual experience. Results advocate that females are exposed early to trauma and exposed late to intervention. Results here are in line with National Data Results.

Introduction

A national movement is taking place toward juvenile justice reform in the United States. Since reform efforts have begun in 2000, Bernalillo County Juvenile Detention Center (BCJDC) has reported a downward trend in overall number of bookings, number of holds, average length of stays (ALOS), and average daily populations (ADP). When these data are disaggregated by gender, males appear to be benefiting from reform more so than females. BCJDC has not had the same success with the female population as they have with the male population.

At BCJDC, administrators together with the Annie E. Casey Foundation have been focusing on gender specific programming. “What are the needs of our female offenders?” “What type of programming works for female offenders?” “Where are the data based studies that support one type of programming over another?” These questions are hard to answer because there are very few studies in the literature that have specifically addressed juvenile female offenders and their needs.

In the past, programming for females has been developed without knowledge of the needs of the population and largely based on success with male populations. Consequently, this has not deterred crime nor impacted recidivism rates for female offenders in Bernalillo County, which are steadily rising (04/05 Fiscal Report Bernalillo County Juvenile Detention Center, 2005). For this reason, the research development office at BCJDC developed a Gender Needs Assessment Survey to study and learn what the needs of the female population were. The present study sampled 100 female juvenile offenders on 10 different areas of their lives, Residential History, Immediate Family Background, Educational Background, Personal Information, Arrest History, Mental Health History, Drug and Alcohol History, Sexual History, Physical Abuse History, and Alternative Programming. The goal was to learn what the young women’s needs were and to assess if BCJDCs current programming addressed these needs.

Goals

- 1) To understand the scope of the issues related to female juvenile offenders in Bernalillo County's juvenile justice system,
- 2) To identify the various types of programming/treatment female juvenile offenders have participated in previous to the survey and gauge the effectiveness of those programs and/or treatments, and
- 3) To assess if current court and detention programs are meeting those needs reported by female juvenile offenders.

Methods

Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses:

Quantitative detention data (e.g., ALOS and ADP) was gathered from existing Management Information Systems (MIS) located at the Bernalillo County Juvenile Detention Center and additional data was gathered from the New Mexico State FACTS system. All quantitative analyses utilized the analysis of variance (ANOVA) model in SPSS.

The qualitative analysis was gathered through one on one interviews with female juvenile offenders who were held at time of booking at the Bernalillo County Juvenile Detention Center located in Albuquerque, New Mexico. All data was extracted and uploaded into SPSS.

Quantitative Analyses:

1. Investigate female population trends across fiscal year since reform efforts begun.
 - a. Crime trends
 - b. Average Daily Population trends
 - c. Recidivism trends
 - d. Average Length of Stay
 - e. Number of females involved in Alternative Programming and their success rate.

Qualitative Analysis:

1. Survey female offenders on 10 domains:
 - a. Residential History
 - b. Immediate Family Background
 - c. Educational Background
 - d. Personal Information

- e. Arrest History
- f. Mental Health History
- g. Drug and Alcohol History
- h. Sexual History
- i. Physical Abuse History
- j. Alternative Programming

Interviews

One hundred females were sampled. The only criterion for selection was that females had to be held at time of booking. Females were taken from the general population at the detention center to a secure private room where the interview took place. Females were told that their anonymity would be protected and they could withdrawal from the interview at any time. With a psychologist overseeing the interviews, 2 clinical social workers administered all of the interviews. After the interview was completed data was coded and entered into SPSS for analysis. All qualitative data was analyzed with the Chi-square statistic unless otherwise noted.

Results

Ethnicity, in addition to gender, was found to play a significant role in what types of crimes females were charged with (BCJDC Fiscal Data Report 04/05/05/06; Figure 1). Average lengths of stays (ALOS) have not significantly changed pre/post reform efforts for females (11 days for fiscal year 05/06; Figure 2). Average daily population has decreased from 24 (99/00) to 17 (05/06) for females, however is not a significant decrease in comparison to males, which decreased from 89 (99/00) to 46 (05/06) days.

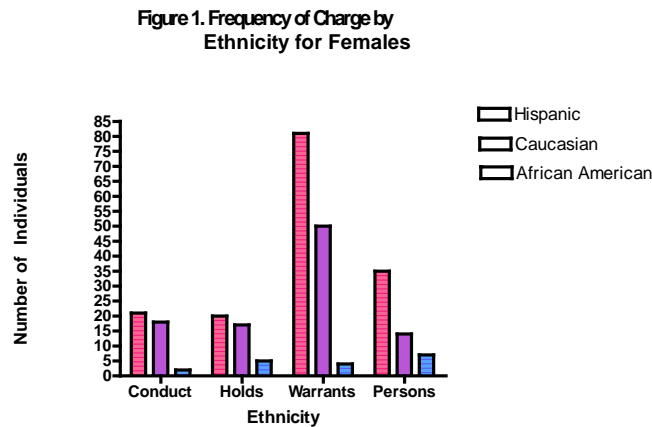
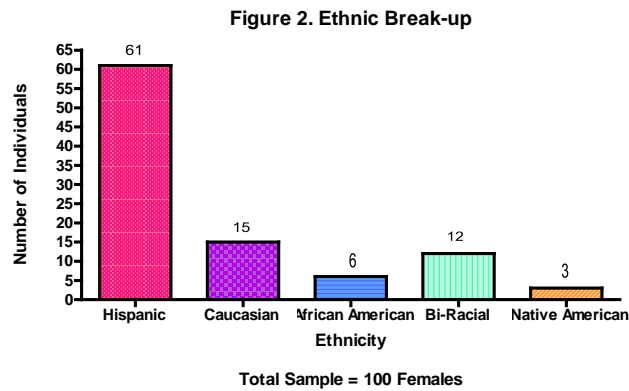


Figure 2 shows the demographics of the female population sampled. The average age (15 years old) and ethnic distribution is representative of the entire female population reported in BCJDC's fiscal data report (2005 and 2006).



Residential History

When females were asked if they have ever lived outside the immediate family home (N=26) 8% reported having lived on the streets, 10% reported their father securing an apartment for them, 3% reported a friend securing an apartment for them, and 2% reported living with friends. Ninety-One percent of the 100 respondents reported not ever having been under foster care or another agency of the state (e. g., Children Youth & Family Division [CYFD]).

When females were asked if they were emancipated or ever sought emancipation from their biological parents 84% reported no, 2% reported yes, and only 1 female reported she was planning to seek emancipation. The remaining 13% did not respond to this question.

Immediate Family Background Information

The reported average family size was five with the average number of siblings being three. Only 1% of 99 respondents reported both their biological parents being deceased, 2% reported being adopted and did not know, and a surprising 13% reported that either their mother OR father was deceased. The remaining 84% reported both their mother and father being alive.

Of the 99 females who responded when asked if their biological parents were married, 86% reported that their parents were not married while 12% reported that they were. The remaining 2% did not respond to this question. Of the 86% of parents who were not married 36% had re-married. Females reported equally that they did (36%) or did not (43%) get along with the new stepparent. When mom or dad remarried females reported on average that they gained two stepsiblings. When asked if their siblings had ever been in the detention center 33% (of 98) reported that they had and 60% reported that they had

not. Of the 33% who had stayed in the detention center their most frequent charges were conduct, drugs and alcohol, and property (See Appendix A for crime schedule).

Ninety-Three percent of females reported that they were not married and have never been married. However, 14% of these women did report having children. Of this 14% the average number of children was 1. At the time of the survey the average age of the children was also 1. None of the women reported any complications during childbirth or medical conditions for their children. Seventy percent of these women also reported having been seen by an OBGYN within the last year, far more than the number of women reporting having babies.

An overwhelming 60% of responders said their family members, outside of siblings, have been either arrested in the past or were currently in jail. Charges varied, without significance, from conduct, drugs and alcohol, property crimes, and weapons charges.

Educational Background Information

Eighty-Four percent of a 100 respondents reported knowing how to read and write. Seventy-Eight percent reported knowing how to type. In spite of this, 37% reported not being in school and the reported highest-grade level when leaving school was the 7th or 8th grade. Thirty percent of the 100 respondents also reported their friends having dropped out of school. Of the 37% reporting not being in school, 4% attributed the reason to their incarceration (current or past unknown), 6% agreed their drug use was why they dropped out, only 2% attributed it to their getting pregnant, 3% reported being kicked out, and the remaining just reported “dropped out.” Coincidentally, 29% of the 100 also reported school as being difficult. When asked if you planned to return to school or wanted to return 100% responded yes. However, 27% of those women who dropped out and attributed this to friends also reported that their friends would be “an obstacle” in returning.

Of the 63% of women who were still attending school only 21% were attending in an Albuquerque Public School. The remaining 47% were attending school at the detention center, an alternative school, already had their GED, or some type of vocational training.

About 80% of the 100 women reported interest in pursuing a college degree. Their interest was driven by the need to make their parents proud (5%), to have a secure future (28%), and to better themselves (36%). The remaining percents were isolated reasons. Medical (29%) and Law (12%) degrees were most frequently reported.

Personal Information

When asked if any of their friends have been arrested 66% of 92 respondents answered yes with conduct (20%), drugs and alcohol (22%), persons (10%), and property (13%) being the highest reported charges. Outcomes ranged from, probation (30%), incarceration (19%), and alternative programming (only 2%).

When asked about gang affiliation women were divided when reporting that their friends (47% of 100) or family members (43%) belonged to gangs, however clearly denied any self-gang involvement (72% of 100).

Arrest History

Seventy-Four percent of 100 reported that their current detainment was not their first arrest (Figure 3.). For example, 42% of those females who reported that their current booking of a conduct crime was not their first arrest for that crime are represented in Figure 4. The average recidivism rate for the 100 women sampled for the same crime distributed above was 1. Women reported an average of 3 previous arrests overall (Figure 5.). Therefore, each female had been booked at least 1 additional time on the same charge that they are currently being detained on if not more than 1 time and had at least 2 previous arrests for a different crime.

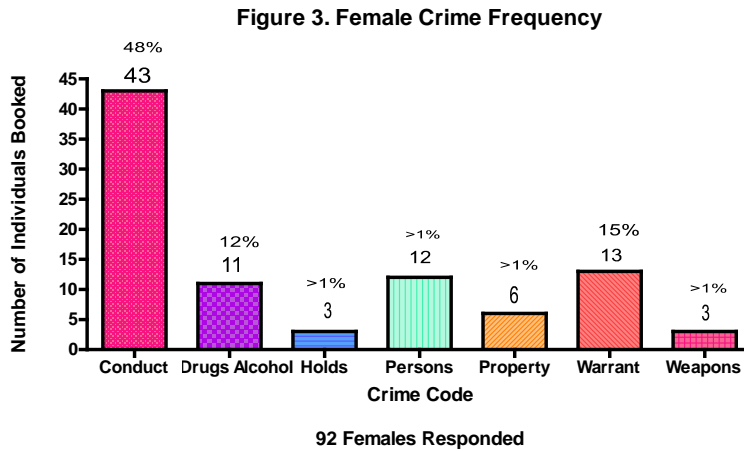


Figure 4. Females Reporting Frist Time Offense for Current Booking

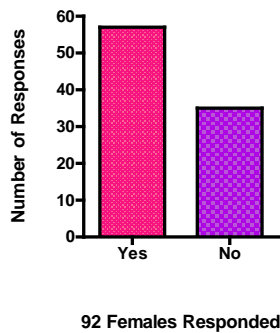
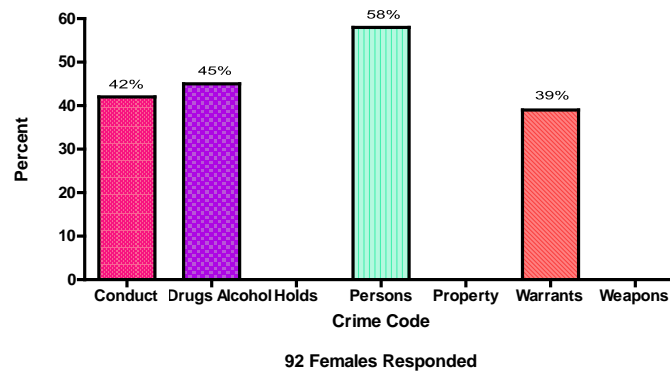


Figure 5. Recidivism by Crime



The average length of stay reported for the current charge the women were being held for (~20 days) coincides with both the Fiscal Data Report and the Quarterly Reports for fiscal years 05 and 06. Conduct (24%), persons (19%), and property (11%) were the most frequent reported charges attached to the average length of stay in this study.

The average age reported for the first arrest was 13 with the most frequent charge of conduct (23%), persons (24%) and property (17%). Over half of the women reported having at least 1 warrant out for their arrest in the past. Of these warrants 98% were reported as probation violations (type of violation unknown) or failure to appear warrants.

Eighty-One percent reported that they had a probation officer (PO) with 59% of the POs being female. Fifty-Eight percent reported to like or be indifferent toward their PO. Sixty percent reported being able to express their needs to their PO, feeling comfortable doing so (59%), however, 31% reported that their PO had not been responsive to their needs. Fifty-One percent reported that their PO was trying to get them into alternative programming while 30% reported that they were not. Women were nearly divided when asked if their PO had “labeled (47% yes)” them.

Women tend to be charged with more low-level crimes more often and detained for longer periods than males (Fiscal Data Report, 04/05). Reported PO relationships were paradoxical. For instance, women report, overall, that they like their PO when she is female; however their POs are not consistently responsive to their needs and may not have their best interest at heart. This is from the detainee’s perspective. It may be wise for the PO to clearly state his/her role in the young women’s current life circumstance.

Mental Health History

Forty percent of 100 women reported receiving some type of government assistance (e. g., Medicaid, welfare, etc).

Seventy-Two percent of the women reported having counseling in the past with Anger (18%), Depression (15%), and Family (14%) being the most frequently reported type. Forty-Five percent of these women were diagnosed with an illness. Of these 45% only 28% agreed with the diagnosis, 45% were offered some type of treatment, and 60% have discontinued treatment. Twenty-Three percent of these women were in treatment for more than a year before discontinuing. Twenty percent of the time it was court ordered treatment. Only 29% of the reported 72% receiving some kind of treatment felt the prescribed treatment was appropriate for their specific problem. Only 26% of the 100 women were court ordered to have an assessment and of these women only 8% of the time was it a condition of release. In cases where an assessment was court ordered, drugs and alcohol appear to be the factor underlying this decision to seek alternative programming.

Twenty-Three percent of 87 respondents are currently on medication. A significant proportion of these women were prescribed antidepressants sometime in the past (prior to the survey). Twenty percent of women prescribed medication were using the medication less than a year. A significant proportion of the diagnoses and prescribed medications were treated by a source other than BCJDC or MHC.

An alarming 40% of women reported to have self-mutilated in the past. Twenty-Three percent of these women reported that this behavior did not make them feel better. Another 23% reported having considered suicide in the past. Fifty-Five percent reported having problems concentrating and 20% reported having a massive head blow in their past. Nearly 100% of women reported loving someone in their life and feeling that someone also loved them.

Women participating in this survey have more likely than not been diagnosed with some type of illness and were prescribed some type of antidepressant medication. These women felt that their diagnosis, which may well be valid, did little to advance therapy in ways in which resulted in behavioral change. Women reported here that medication alone was not "the cure all" they expected. As a matter of fact, a considerable proportion of women discontinued use of their medication within a year of being diagnosed and treated.

These women are capable of loving and being loved. Women reported a high prevalence for confusion and possible brain injury. This may be mitigating the healthy development of significant relationships in their lives. Self-mutilation may have been a way to obtain clarity in a confusing environment. It is a positive note that few to none reported this behavior as rewarding.

Drug & Alcohol History

Fifty-Four percent of women reported taking some kind of drug sometime prior to being in the detention center. The most frequent reported drug was marijuana (20%), alcohol (11%), and Methamphetamine (11%). When asked how long they have been abusing drugs 79 individuals responded answering less than a year (13%), more than a year

(20%), more than 2 years (5%), more than 3 years (11%). The remaining percent was mostly experimental use. The average reported age of first drug use was 10; drug of choice was alcohol (36%) and marijuana (39%). Forty-Nine percent reported that they graduated through drugs beginning with alcohol and ultimately trying hallucinogens. Sixty-Four percent of women smoke cigarettes.

Almost 40% reported having been enrolled in a rehabilitation program in the past. Only 12% of these women reported being successful (not using since graduating from program). In addition, these women did not attribute success to the rehabilitation program further reporting that the program didn't really address their needs.

Our young women are experimenting and being introduced to drugs and alcohol at a very young neural developmental age. There is cause for concern when a 10-year-old drinks and uses drugs as a coping mechanism. Young women at this age cannot afford this type of neural re-construction. Alcohol and drugs influence future neural connectivity and will impede normal age appropriate developmental skills attributed to normal connective growth.

Sexual History

Seventy percent of 90 respondents reported they were heterosexual and having their first sexual experience at an average age of 12.5 when they were willing participants. For those women who were willing participants about 60% reported the experience as "not being pleasurable." The average age of the sexual partner was reported to be 15. The average numbers of partners the women reported to have had at the time of the survey was six.

Thirty percent of 100 women reported their first sexual experience as being forced. For these women, the average age of forced sex was 10. The average number of times women reported that they were forced to have sex was 12.5. The average age of the sexual partner was reported to be 18. The average numbers of partners the women reported to have had at the time of the survey was four. Thirty-Five percent of 100 women answered the question, "Did you know your predator?" They responded yes 27% of the time. Too few women answered the follow-up question, "Is the predator a family member?" We revealed 13% having said yes and 20% having said no (n=33). Thirteen of the 45 women reported that the predator was their father 5% of the time, their mother 1% of the time, another relative 5% of the time, and their partner 2% of the time. The remaining percent was not disclosed (i. e., the predator was an unreported person).

When we asked the 30% (referenced above) of women if they had told anyone about the forced sexual experience 23% said they did and no charges were brought. We also asked the women if they thought they were at fault or could have done something to avoid the rape. Women responded that they did not think it was their fault (25%), however did believe they could have done something to avoid the situation (20%; a paradox).

Forced sexual history was correlated with first drug and alcohol use ($r=.86$). Women who were forced to have sex had sex earlier in their lives with older partners. Women whose first sexual experience was forced also tended to have fewer sexual partners at the time of this survey, interestingly enough.

Physical Abuse History

Thirty-Seven percent of women reported that drug and alcohol use did not help them cope with any existing problems reported above in sections 1-10 ($n=82$). When asked, "Have you ever been physically abused," 44% of 90 respondents said yes, just about half. Of the 44% who reported being physically abused they also reported their mothers as being the abuser 18% of the time, their father 15% of the time, their partner, another stepparent, or sibling 11% of the time. Forty percent of 52 women reported that they did trust someone to tell them about the abuse. The remaining 12% reported that they would be afraid to tell anyone for fear of further abuse of self or siblings.

Women were finally asked if they thought their community had failed them. An overwhelming 59% of 84 respondents replied yes.

Alternative Programming

Sixty-Five percent of 90 women responded having heard of alternative programming. Forty-Eight percent of 98 women had at one time been enrolled in an alternative program (e. g., CCP 21%, YRC 9%, Treatment Foster Care (TFC) 1%, Drug Court 5%, Residential Treatment Centers (RTC) 5%, and Program for Empowering Women (PEG) 7%). Two percent had participated in more than two alternative programs in the past. Of the 48% who had been enrolled in Alternative Programming at one time 28% reported that the program was not helpful. Twenty percent reported that it was.

Goals across programs varied only somewhat as reported by respondents. The majority of respondents reported that the program goals were to decrease high-risk behavior by monitoring movement (75%). Over half of the respondents reported that the program goal was not met. When asked, "What did the program lack?" Women responded by saying, "resources", "answers to MY problems", "better direction from PO", "organization", "consistent rules," and "follow-up measures."

Forty-Five of the 48 respondents said they took the program serious. Half of the women reported being successful and half reported not being successful (this is inclusive of all programming). The women's understanding of success was much different than our own administration's criteria for program success, e. g., with CCP. For instance, if a woman relapses using methamphetamine again while on the CCP program we would not necessarily call this a fail for CCP, given what the program is designed to do - monitor. However, the women reporting on this question did not have a clear understanding of these criteria. It seemed as if the women had no idea more often than not what was expected and what the goal was for any of the programs.

Program development and success is key for reform. Women who participated in this survey were clear to demonstrate that they had a lack of program understanding. More often than not women did not understand why they were being considered for some programs. In addition, women reported that there was a lack of organization within the programs to demonstrate their willingness to help them. In other words, there was a great deal of women reporting a lack of resource made available to them within the programs. 45% took programming serious and put forth a good effort to be successful, in spite of their ignorance about program goals.

Self-Report of Need

An overwhelming 86% of 90 respondents reported that they do think about their future. This last section of the survey elicited a more open-ended response from participants. Following are their responses to two questions asking what they thought should be included in an alternative program for young women.

When surveyed, there was a substantial variation in responses in reference to a question asked in the Self-report section, 1) “if you could develop a program for young women taught by women what would you include in this program? and 2) what would the programs need to help make you successful?”

Given the 100 women that were surveyed there in turn were 140 responses differing in opinion of what kind of programs they would implement. The most frequent of responses consisted of needing Job Skills, Mentorship, Life Skills, Drugs and Alcohol counseling, and Parenting classes. Those secondary concerns were Sex Education, Self-Esteem Development, Coping Skills Development, Anger Management classes, Women’s Issues, Peer Groups, Relationship / Family counseling, Self-Defense, Health classes, and a Sex Abuse Awareness program.

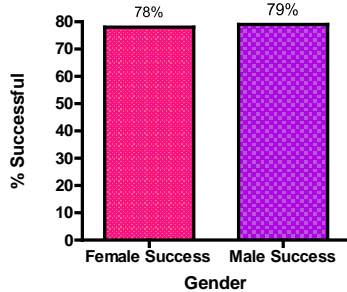
Conclusion/Discussion

The goals of the study were to assess the needs of the female population at BCJDC. The first goal, to understand the scope of the problems facing female offenders, was clearly met. Female offenders face a number of high risk factors that include early trauma (e. g., sexual predation), early drug and alcohol use, and high incidence of dropping out of school, which significantly contributes to increase risk in contact with detention centers.

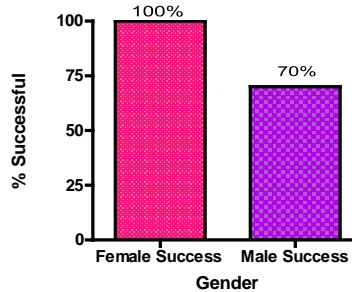
The second goal, to identify programming available to female offenders and gauge the effectiveness of these programs, was also met. Female offenders, however highly successful, at BCJDC do not get referred to alternative programming (e. g., Community Custody [CCP] and Youth Reporting Center [YRC]; Figure 6) as often as male juvenile offenders. Data on other alternative programming available through the court was not available. Females were found to be successful for reporting and while being monitored. Although, females reported here not to have a clear understanding of program goals and purpose as to how the programs related to their specific charge or high needs problem.

This uncertainty appears to be further clouded by the perceived role of the probation officer.

CCP Program Outcome by Gender 04/05



YRC Program Outcome by Gender 04/05



The third goal, to assess if current court and detention programs are meeting those needs reported by female juvenile offenders, was somewhat met. The results suggest that females are in need of mental health intervention while on high monitoring programs such as CCP. If females can participate in programs successfully they have a smaller chance of re-offending in the future. BCJDC's fiscal data report (04/05) shows positive impact on recidivism rates, regardless of gender, one year after successful completion of programming.

Recommendations

Given the results, BCJDC should consider dual programming for females, such as high level of monitoring while in treatment and utilize step-down models for re-entry to the community. Keeping in mind the "least restrictive rule." Young children do not work well within perceived extreme measures of punishment. Also, detention centers should provide available resources, such as those outlined above in the self-report of need, not only in the detention center, but rather successful community oriented resources that will provide assistance for the long-term. Once re-entry into the community is possible, after successful completion of treatment, one should devise a plan to make available a list of community resources to help the females succeed academically, or help mainstreaming them into a functional working environment.