



Portrait of Risk



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PACE Center for Girls, Inc. Portrait of Risk

The Need for Gender Specific Risk Factors

Background of the Key Issues

The nation and the State of Florida are struggling with a grim statistic: Girls now makes up the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice system's population. The American Bar Association and the National Bar Association's research study, *Justice by Gender- The Lack of Appropriate Prevention, Diversion and Treatment Alternatives for Girls in the Justice System* (2001), reported that the 83% increase in female delinquency cases was a "national emergency". The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice statistics mirror this national trend and show that one out of every four juveniles arrested is female. While girls account for one out of four arrests, appropriate services that are designed to meet their unique needs are lacking and in some areas non-existent.

Despite research and evidence documenting gender differences in criminal offending and pathways to delinquency, juvenile correctional agencies have been slow to implement services designed to target the needs of girls. Delinquent girls have been considered a low priority in juvenile justice systems throughout the country and have historically been placed in programs that were designed for males, which are ill equipped to handle females.

Needs of Girls in the Juvenile Justice System

When creating or evaluating juvenile justice programs designed for girls and young women, it is critical to begin with the understanding of female development and a complete portrait of the gender specific risks factors that impact the lives of girls. Young women who have endured challenging environments and victimizing situations present unique treatment issues. Providing services similar to the ones offered to young men do not effectively address the risk profile that statistical research paints for girls. To be effective, services must reflect an understanding of the unique issues that girls face as they grow up in today's society. When girl responsive services are available, research and experience show us that girls have significant strengths that can be drawn upon to overcome the multiple stressors and past trauma that create daily challenges for them.

Definition of Gender Specific (Responsive) Services

Gender Specific Services are those services designed to meet the unique needs of girls and young women. They value the female perspective, celebrate and honor the female experience. Additionally, they respect and take into account female development and empower young women to reach their full potential. Gender responsive services intentionally allow gender identity and development to effect and guide all aspects of service delivery. True gender responsive services go far beyond providing for an all girl population, an "all female" facility or caseload.

In response to the special needs of girls, PACE Center for Girls, Inc., a not-for-profit, minority provider, was established in 1985 as an alternative to incarceration or institutionalization of troubled adolescent girls in Jacksonville, Florida. Today, PACE serves 22 local Florida communities (19 direct care centers and 3 outreach programs) and is recognized as a national model for girls programming. PACE offers a comprehensive continuum of gender responsive education and treatment services for girls who are at risk or who are in the justice system.

PACE is Successful at Reducing Recidivism and Other Risk Factors

By utilizing a gender responsive approach to programming PACE has achieved some of the most outstanding outcomes in the nation with this population of girls. Our expertise is sought by others to help them better understand how to work with girls more effectively. PACE responded to this demand by launching in 2003 the PACE Institute which is dedicated to providing training and technical consultative services to providers on gender responsive programming.

PACE Outcomes (2003-04 PACE Year End Report)

- 88% who completed had not committed a crime one year following enrollment
- 91% improved academic functioning
- 83% fewer girls reported sexual abuse
- 90% fewer girls used drugs
- 86% fewer girls reported using alcohol
- 76% fewer girls reported emotional abuse
- 73% fewer girls reported physical abuse
- 74% fewer girls exhibited runaway behaviors

Gender Specific Research-Based Risk Factors

A critical component to providing gender specific services is assessing the presence of risk factors associated in the research with girls' offending. Examples of these factors are incidence of rape, sexual, physical and emotional abuse, early initiation to sex, absent parents, poverty, school failure, domestic violence, and mental health disorders. Our Portrait of Risk snapshot of PACE girls underscores the need to collect data on these gender specific issues. It is important to note that these factors seldom occur in isolation. More typically, risks factors for girls are interconnected.

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A Snapshot of PACE Girls Using Gender-Specific Risk Factors

PACE Girls Served March 18, 2005
872 Girls

School Failure			Victimization		
	Number	Percentage		Number	Percentage
Expelled/Suspended	538	61.7%	Physical Abuse	233	26.7%
Missed 6-20 days last year	374	42.9%	Sexual Abuse	188	21.6%
Missed 21-30 days last year	126	14.5%	Rape	125	14.3%
Missed 31 or more days	206	23.6%	Emotional Abuse	318	36.5%
2 -8 years behind in reading	460	52.8%	Abuse Reports	308	35.3%
At least five years	90	10.3%	Abused at Home	247	28.3%
2-8 years behind in math	478	54.8%			
At least five years	127	14.6%			
Learning disabled	116	13.3%			
Family Instability and Conflict			Health Risks: Physical, Emotional, Mental		
Neglect	174	20.0%	Serious Physical Health Problems	193	22.1%
Incarcerated Parent(s)	214	24.5%	Substance Abuse	383	44.3%
Seriously Ill Parent	141	16.2%	Alcohol Abuse	340	39.7%
Parent Deceased	94	10.8%	Self Mutilation	158	18.2%
Parent(s) with Mental Illness	227	26.0%	Mental Health Disorders	324	37.2%
Parent(s) History of Suicide Attempts	84	9.6%	Previous Suicidal Ideation	279	32.0%
Domestic Violence in the Home	286	32.8%	Attempted Suicide	139	15.9%
Live in Out of Home Placement	153	17.6%	Eating Disorders	68	7.8%
Moved 3 or More Times in Last 5 Years	267	30.6%	Cigarette Addiction	289	33.8%
			Runaway Behavior	269	31.8%
			Gang Involvement	78	11.81%
Early Sexual Activity and Pregnancy			Demographics: Race, Ethnicity, Age, Income, Household, Neighborhood		
Early Initiation of Sexual Activity	533	61.1%	Race & Ethnicity		
Sexual Active (reported)	520	59.6%	White	377	43.2%
History of Pregnancy	80	9.2%	Black	358	41.1%
			Other-Hispanic	137	15.7%
Arrest History			Income Level		
Prior Arrest	246	28.2%	Very Low	378	43.3%
Prior Adjudications	115	13.2%	Low	310	35.6%
Adjudications Withheld	113	13.0%	Other	184	21.1%
Currently on Probation	107	12.3%	Live in Single Parent Household	535	61.9%
			Ages of girls served: 10-18		
			Median Age: 14 Years and 11 months		

Looking Ahead

During the 2005 Florida Legislative session, House Bill 1989 was passed. This landmark legislation requires gender specific programming within the Department of Juvenile Justice, and requires the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability to conduct an analysis of services currently available statewide, including residential and non residential programming. It also requires that school districts provide appropriate instruments and services, including access to Virtual School courses. Workgroups will also be established to suggest strategies for meeting the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act and to reward juvenile justice education programs for high performance. Florida has become one of only two states in the nation that has acted to protect girls and provide needed services.

PACE will continue to work collaboratively with the Departments of Education and Juvenile Justice to ensure that the needs of adolescent girls in Florida are met. We applaud the legislature for their wisdom and courage in working to reverse what has become a disturbing upward trend in the number of girls in juvenile justice.