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## Understanding and addressing female delinquency in Illinois

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Recently, practitioners, policymakers and researchers have taken notice of the sizable increase in the number of female delinquents entering the juvenile justice system. However, because girls account for a small percentage of juvenile arrests—27 percent of all juvenile arrests nationwide in 1999 (Snyder, 2000)—and because their offenses are often considered less serious than those committed by boys, female delinquents are often overlooked. In fact, researchers have found that most juvenile justice systems in the United States are ill-equipped to deal

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with delinquent girls (Chesney-Lind, 2001); and the limited number of programs that serve female delinquents are often based on the needs and developmental patterns of boys and/or the criminological theories that explain male delinquency (Miller and Trapani, 1995).

Before programming can be developed for female juvenile offenders, however, it is important to identify and understand the characteristics and needs of female delinquents.

Program administrators interested in developing programming for females should also consider the new approaches to gender-responsive programming for girls. This report presents what information is known about female juvenile offenders in Illinois, common characteristics of female delinquents, and promising approaches to gender-responsive programming for girls.

### Female delinquents in Illinois: What do we know?

What is known about female juvenile offenders in Illinois is limited. Currently, there are no data available on the actual number of females entering or moving through the juvenile justice system. Although there are a few data sources available at the state level that allow examination of female delinquents in Illinois—



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state level data on the sex, race, and ethnicity of offenders are available for juvenile admissions to the Illinois Department of Corrections-Illinois Youth Centers and admissions to Illinois' temporary juvenile detention centers—most state-level juvenile justice data are not collected by sex, race and ethnicity. Moreover, state-level offense and arrest data are not collected by sex, race, ethnicity, *or* age.

To compensate for the lack of information about offenders in Illinois, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, with the cooperation of other state and local agencies, has engaged in several data collection efforts focusing on adult and juvenile offenders. One such effort was a statewide arrest data collection project, which entailed collecting information on adult and juvenile arrests from a sample of law enforcement agencies across Illinois. Another data collection project was a probation outcome survey, which entailed collecting information on adult and juvenile probationers who were discharged from probation during a four-week period in 2000. Although these data only represent snapshots of juvenile offenders in Illinois, they do provide important insights into the characteristics of juveniles entering or involved in Illinois' juvenile justice system. These data and data on admissions to Illinois Youth Centers and Illinois' temporary juvenile detention centers are examined below.

**Arrests**

Based on Authority arrest data, it is estimated that in 1999, 8,882 female juvenile offenders were arrested in Illinois, accounting for 23 percent of all juvenile arrests (see Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, 1997 for the methodology used). These numbers include arrests for violent index offenses (murder, criminal sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault), property index offenses (burglary, larceny/

**Table 1**  
**Percent of Female Arrests in 1999, by Offense Type**  
**(N=8,882)**

Offense Type	Percent of Female Arrests*
<b>Violent Index Offenses</b>	<b>14%</b>
Murder	0%
Criminal Sexual Assault	0%
Robbery	1%
Aggravated Assault	13%
<b>Property Index Offenses</b>	<b>74%</b>
Burglary	4%
Larceny/Theft	67%
Motor Vehicle Theft	2%
Arson	0%
<b>Unlawful Use of Weapon (Uuw)</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Drug Offenses</b>	<b>11%</b>
Possession Cannabis	7%
Manufacturing/Delivery Cannabis	0%
Possession Controlled Substance	3%
Manufacturing/Delivery Controlled Substance	0%

Source: Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority arrest estimates.  
\*May not add up to 100% due to rounding.

theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson), unlawful use of weapons offenses (Uuw), and drug offenses (possession, manufacturing or delivery of cannabis or controlled substances). Of those females arrested in Illinois, 51 percent were arrested in Cook County, 25 percent in urban counties, 16 percent in collar counties and 8 percent in rural counties.<sup>1</sup>

Property index offenses accounted for 74 percent of female arrests in Illinois, violent index offenses accounted for 14 percent of arrests, and drug offenses accounted for 11 percent of arrests (Table 1). As for specific offenses, larceny/theft accounted for 67 percent of all female juvenile offender arrests. This

<sup>1</sup> Collar counties are the five counties that border Cook County and include DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties. Urban counties are based on the Metropolitan Statistical Area. When possible, collar counties were examined separately from urban counties.

large percentage is not surprising given that research available on female offenders indicates that most females commit nonviolent, less serious offenses (Acoca, 1999; Chesney-Lind, 2001). The second highest percentage of female arrests was for aggravated assault (13 percent), followed by possession of cannabis (7 percent).

Although the estimates from the Authority's arrest data collection project illustrate the types of offenses for which female juveniles are arrested, it is unknown how many of these arrest charges were filed in court and how many resulted in station adjustments (i.e., the youth officer handled the case in the police station without referring it to court). Without this information, it is unknown how many females are actually entering the juvenile court system. Additionally, because arrest estimates for prior years were not available, it is impossible to know if there has been an actual change in female juvenile arrests over time.

#### *Probation*

An Illinois study using a statewide sample of 189 female juveniles discharged from probation during a four-week period in 2000 (see Adams, Olson and Adkins, 2002) found that 69 percent of female juveniles were on probation for misdemeanor offenses, while 23 percent were on probation for felony offenses. Looking at types of crimes, 39 percent of females in the sample were on probation for property offenses, 37 percent for violent offenses and 6 percent for drug-related offenses.

The average age of female juveniles discharged from probation during the sampling period was 15 years. Sixty-one percent of the girls discharged from probation were white, 25 percent were black, and 13 percent were Hispanic. Minority female juveniles discharged from probation tended to be from the larger, urban counties. In Cook County, minority female juveniles accounted for 73 percent (35 of 48) of all females discharged from juvenile probation. In urban counties other than Cook minority females accounted for 34 percent (34 of 101) of females discharged, and in rural counties they accounted for 10 percent (4 of 40) of female juveniles discharged.

Eighteen females had parented one or more children prior to entering probation. Additionally, 26 females

were pregnant while on probation, of which, 17 gave birth while under supervision.

Many female juveniles discharged from probation had a history of alcohol or illicit substance abuse. Forty percent of the female juveniles discharged from probation during the sampling period were identified as having abused alcohol and 48 percent had abused illicit drugs prior to or at the time of intake (n=151, 157). The most frequent type of illicit drug abused was marijuana. Of the 26 pregnant teens, 11 had known histories of drug abuse and 7 had known histories of alcohol abuse. Six of these pregnant teens were still abusing alcohol and two were abusing drugs at the time of intake.

Similar to the arrest estimates, data on female juvenile probationers for prior years are unavailable. Although the data above do provide important information about female juveniles, there are many questions left unanswered. Are more girls being sentenced to probation than in the past? Have the types of crimes for which female juveniles are being sentenced to probation changed? Have the characteristics of girl offenders changed? These and other questions still cannot be answered about girls in Illinois' juvenile justice system.

#### *Detention*

In Illinois, juveniles can be admitted to a temporary juvenile detention center before or after a finding of guilt. Between 1998 and 2000, three-quarters of girls admitted to detention were admitted prior to their case dispositions, indicating that most girls were entering detention centers before being found delinquent. Trends in detention admissions could not be examined due to incomplete and unreliable data collected prior to 1998.

Between 1998 and 2000, 9,998 females were admitted to temporary juvenile detention centers in Illinois, accounting for 19 percent of the total number of juveniles admitted to detention during that period.<sup>2</sup> Urban counties accounted for the largest percentage

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<sup>2</sup> These numbers may overestimate the total numbers of females entering detention centers because some female juveniles may enter detention centers more than once.

of females admitted to detention centers (30 percent), followed by rural counties (27 percent), Cook County (24 percent), and collar counties (19 percent). The average age of girls admitted to detention between 1998 and 2000 was 15 years. Forty-six percent of females admitted to temporary detention centers were white, 44 percent were African-American, and 8 percent were Hispanic.

Of girls admitted to temporary juvenile detention centers between 1998 and 2000, 47 percent were admitted for court violations, warrants, or contempt of court. Among boys admitted to secure detention during that period, 30 percent were admitted for court violations, warrants, or contempt of court.

Additionally, of girls admitted to secure detention during this time, 28 percent were admitted for violent offenses, 16 percent for property offenses, 4 percent for drug offenses, and 2 percent for status offenses.

#### *Illinois Youth Centers*

Between state fiscal years 1993 and 2002, 1,703 females were committed to Illinois Youth Centers (IYCs) operated by the Illinois Department of Corrections for new offenses.<sup>3</sup> During this time period, females accounted for approximately 10 percent of all juvenile commitments for new offenses to IYCs. Female juveniles from urban counties accounted for 44 percent of girls committed to IYCs during this period, followed by girls from rural counties (29 percent), girls from Cook County (18 percent), and girls from collar counties (9 percent).

Between 1993 and 2002, the average age of females committed to IYCs was 16 years. Fifty-four percent of girls committed for new offenses to IYCs during that period were white, 39 percent were African American, 7 percent were Hispanic, and less than 1 percent were Asian or American Indian.

Similar to what was found when the arrest estimates and probation outcome data were examined, the majority of females were committed to IYCs for property crimes (44 percent). Crimes against persons accounted for the second highest percentage of female

#### Female offenders: A national profile

A typical female juvenile involved in the juvenile justice system in 1997:

- Was 15-16 years old.
- Was a marginal student or failing academically.
- Was a victim of physical, sexual or emotional abuse.
- Was a status offender.
- Was living in poverty.
- Was living in an unstable environment.
- Had a history of family incarceration.
- Had a history of alcohol, tobacco, and other substance use/abuse.
- Was a racial or ethnic minority.
- Possessed the likelihood of heightened-levels of relational aggression.

Source: Greene, Peters and Associates, 1998 as cited in Iowa Commission on the Status of Women, 1999.

juvenile commitments to IYCs (42 percent), followed by drugs (4 percent), other crimes (3 percent), and sex crimes (2 percent). Fifty-one percent of female delinquents committed to IYCs were sentenced for nonviolent offenses and 43 percent were sentenced for violent offenses.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike arrest, probation, and temporary detention data, commitment data from IYCs can be examined over time. Between state fiscal years 1993 and 2002, the female commitment rate for new offenses more than doubled, from 26 to 56 commitments per 100,000 females ages 13 to 16 years.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note, however, that it can only be hypothesized as to why this increase occurred. Since data are unavailable for earlier stages in the juvenile justice system, it is impossible to know whether the female commitment rate to IYCs increased because more females were arrested and referred to court, or because judges were more likely to sentence females to IYCs than in prior years.

<sup>3</sup> State fiscal year is July 1-June 30.

<sup>4</sup> Offense data were missing for 6 percent of the cases.

<sup>5</sup> Rates calculated using 1999 population.

## Characteristics of female delinquents

Although information on the characteristics of female delinquents in Illinois is lacking, researchers across the United States have highlighted some common characteristics of female juvenile offenders (see box on page 4, *Female offenders: A national profile*). These characteristics include previous victimization, academic failure, physical and/or mental health problems, and nonviolent offending. Below is a brief description of these characteristics.

### *Victimization*

Previous victimization—sexual, physical, or emotional abuse—is one of the most common characteristics of female delinquents (Sherman, 2002). In fact, many researchers have identified female victimization as one of the most important factors precipitating female offending (Acoca, 1999). One study found that 64 percent of female offenders interviewed reported sexual abuse, and 81 percent of those reported having been raped. Forty-two percent also reported dating violence (Miller, 1990, 1992 as cited in Miller and Trapani, 1995). In another study of 200 female juvenile offenders in four California counties, Acoca and Dedel (1998) found that 92 percent of the juvenile female offenders interviewed reported some type of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse in their lifetimes (as cited in Acoca, 1999).

An important aspect of girls' victimization is the relationships between girls and their victimizers. Unlike males, people known and/or trusted by females are often the perpetrators of crimes against them (Stanko, 2001). Thus, victimization often occurs in girls' relationships with others. This type of "relational victimization" can have a profound impact on how girls react to their victimization (e.g., self-esteem, substance use, aggression), the services they need to survive their victimization (e.g., out of home placement, therapy), and the way families deal with girls'

victimizations (e.g., denial, blame) particularly when the victimization occurs within the home or by relatives or family friends.

Programs working with girls who have victimization histories should also note that sexual, physical, and emotional victimization can lead to several other negative outcomes for female victims, including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, alcohol and substance abuse, and problems developing and maintaining relationships with others (Hamblen, 1998). Sexually abused female adolescents may also have problems with self-image, sexual attitudes, and educational goals (Miller and Trapani, 1995). These negative outcomes can impact girls' willingness to participate in programming and programs' abilities to achieve intended results.

### *Academic failure*

Another common characteristic of female delinquents is academic failure. Academic failure, including truancy, suspensions, expulsions and poor grades, has been found to be significantly related to female juvenile offending *and* repeat offending (Sherman, 2002). In a study of 200 female delinquents in California, Acoca (1999) found that 91 percent of girls reported some type of academic failure (e.g., suspension, expulsion, and repeating

grades). Acoca also found that many of the girls reported negative experiences during school, such as harassment by peers and racism. Delinquent girls have also reported limited attention from adults during school (Acoca, 1999). This finding is consistent with other research that has found girls, in general, receive less attention in the classroom than boys (Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan, 1995).

### *Physical and mental health*

Many female juveniles entering the juvenile justice system have, or have had, serious physical and mental health problems (Acoca, 1999). Such health problems include depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, low self-esteem, sexually transmitted diseases (STD), preg-

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## Female adolescents in Illinois: Did you know?

### *Victimization<sup>a</sup>*

- In 2000, 15,148 cases of child abuse and neglect against females were verified in Illinois. Female victims represented 52 percent of all verified cases of child abuse and neglect in Illinois in 2000.
- In 2000, 2,525 case of child sexual abuse against females were verified in Illinois. Female victims represented 78 percent of all verified cases of child sexual abuse in Illinois in 2000.

### *Academic performance<sup>b</sup>*

- Females accounted for 46 percent of all truants between the 1990/1991 and 2000/2001 academic school years. Nineteen percent of female truants were considered chronic truants—that is, they were absent from school without valid reason for 18 or more of the previous 180 school days.
- Females accounted for 29 percent of all suspensions between the 1990/1991 and 2000/2001 academic school years. Of those females suspended, 62 percent (246,389 females) were suspended more than once.
- Between the 1990/1991 and 2000/2001 academic school years, females accounted for 22 percent of those expelled.
- Between the 1990/1991 and 1999/2000 academic school years, females accounted for 43 percent of all dropouts.

### *Unprotected sex/ teen pregnancy*

- In 1996, the gonorrhea rate in Illinois was 969 cases per 100,000 females ages 15-19 years. This rate was notably higher than the national rate (969 versus 699 cases per 100,000 females ages 15-19 years, respectively).<sup>c</sup>
- Between 1993 and 2000, the statewide teen birth rate for females ages 10-17 decreased 29 percent, from 1,577 to 1,119 births per 100,000 females ages 10-17 years.<sup>d</sup>
- The pregnancy termination rate for youth under 17 years decreased 29 percent from 1995 to 2000, falling from 740 terminations per 100,000 females ages 10 to 17 in 1995 to 528 terminations per 100,000 females ages 10 to 17 in 2000.<sup>d</sup>

### *Alcohol and substance use<sup>e</sup>*

- In 1997, a survey of 4,786 female students in Illinois, grades 7-12, found that 63 percent of female students reported that they had used alcohol at least once in their lifetime, and 41 percent reported using alcohol in the past month. Forty-nine percent of female students reported using tobacco in their lifetime, and 31 percent reported using tobacco in the past month.
- Thirty-eight percent of female students reported using an illicit substance in their lifetime, and 24 percent reported using an illicit substance in the past month. The most frequently cited illicit substance used was marijuana—32 percent of female students reported using marijuana in their lifetime and 21 percent reported using marijuana in the past month.

### *Mental health*

- Between 1998 and 2000, females accounted for 74 percent of the reported cases of suicides attempted or committed by youth, ages 10 to 16 years, in Illinois (N=952).<sup>f</sup> Between 1994 and 2000, 51,624 females ages 10-19 were discharged from hospitals (15 percent of all discharges) in Illinois for some type of mental disorder.<sup>g</sup>

### *Physical health*

- Between 1994 and 1999, unintentional motor vehicle crashes was the leading cause of injury for females ages 10 to 19 years admitted to one of Illinois' 67 trauma centers.<sup>h</sup>

### *Notes:*

a. Source: Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

b. Source: Illinois State Board of Education.

c. Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation ([www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org)).

d. Source: Illinois Department of Public Health.

e. Source: Illinois Department of Human Services, *DHS Youth Study on Substance Use* (1999).

f. Source: Illinois Department of Public Health, *Illinois Violent Injury Registry*.

g. Source: Illinois Department of Public Health, Illinois Hospitals and Health Systems Association, *Hospital Discharge Data*.

h. Source: Illinois Department of Public Health, Trauma Registry ([www.idph.state.il.us](http://www.idph.state.il.us)).

nancy, and alcohol or substance use/abuse. Some of these health-related problems are interrelated and/or are related to negative experiences in these girls' pasts. For instance, girls may abuse illicit substances to deal with depression that developed from past physical, emotional or sexual abuse. Below is a brief discussion of some physical and mental health problems girls in the juvenile justice system may experience.

### *Depression*

During early adolescence depression in female adolescents increases dramatically (Obeidallah and Earls, 1999). Although the direction of the relationship between female adolescent depression and delinquent behavior is still unknown (i.e., it is unknown if depression causes delinquency or vice versa), studies have shown that females who are depressed report more delinquent or antisocial behavior than females who are not depressed. For instance, Obeidallah and Earls (1999) found in a sample of adolescent girls that 68 percent of those who were mildly to moderately depressed said they had committed property crimes, while just 40 percent of females in the sample who were not depressed said they had committed property crimes. Additionally, they found that 82 percent of depressed adolescent girls said they had engaged in crimes against persons, while only 42 percent of females who were not depressed said they committed such crimes.

Depression can also lead to suicide. Many females who enter the juvenile justice system report having contemplated or attempted suicide (Acoca, 1999). Researchers examining health risk behaviors of juveniles residing in 39 correctional facilities in the U.S. found that 40 percent of the 219 female respondents reported past suicidal thoughts, 37 percent reported planning a suicide, 35 percent had attempted suicide, and 20 percent reported an injury resulting from a suicide attempt (Morris et al., 1995).

### *High-risk behavior*

Although there is debate over whether female sexual behavior or pregnancy indicates girls are delinquent or "out of control," research does suggest that girls entering the juvenile justice system are often engaging in high-risk behaviors such as unprotected sex. One study of 219 female juvenile offenders living in correc-

tional facilities across the United States found that 87 percent of females reported having sexual intercourse, however, only 47 percent reported using some form of contraception (birth control, condoms) during their last sexual experience (Morris et al., 1995). Another study of juvenile inmates found that 44 percent of 147 females reported having a STD (e.g., chlamydia, trichomonas, or gonorrhea) in the past (Canterbury et al., 1995).

Unprotected sex can also result in pregnancy. Pregnancy can place girls and their children at risk for other negative outcomes, including financial difficulties and other social and health-related problems (Maynard and Garry, 1997). Girls' pregnancies may also influence what programs or services are available to them in the juvenile justice system. Pregnant females going through the juvenile justice system may be at an even greater disadvantage than their counterparts because their pregnancy or sexual behavior may be considered deviant in the eyes of juvenile justice practitioners.

Many female juveniles entering the juvenile justice system also report using and/or abusing alcohol and drugs. Morris et al. (1995), in their study of 219 juveniles residing in correctional facilities, found that 55 percent of girls reported drinking alcohol more than 20 days in their life, 42 percent reported having used cocaine, 10 percent reported having used crack cocaine 40 or more times, and 20 percent of girls reported injecting drugs. Alcohol and drugs may also reduce inhibitions and may place girls at greater risk for physical or sexual victimization.

### *Nonviolent offending*

Most girls who enter the juvenile justice system have committed nonviolent, less-serious offenses, such as property and drug offenses (Acoca, 1999). Many girls also enter the juvenile justice system for status offenses (i.e., offenses that are not a crime if committed by an adult), such as running away (Chesney-Lind, 2001). Although, in general, girls' offenses are less serious, some researchers have highlighted girls' involvement in assaults or batteries. In many instances, these assaults or batteries occur in their relationships with others. For instance, one qualitative study of girls' assault records indicated that many of

the assaults occurred between girls and their parents (Acoca, 1999). Other studies have suggested that girls are becoming more involved in more serious offenses (Calhoun and Jurgens, 1993). However, some researchers have found that girls' involvement in more serious, violent crimes is due to their relationships with other boys or men, or due to their affiliation with gangs (Acoca, 1999; Molidor, 1996).

## Gender-responsive programming for girls

The development of gender-specific programming for female juvenile offenders has been largely influenced by research on female adolescent development and the characteristics of female delinquents (e.g., sexual and physical abuse histories). This section highlights some general suggestions for creating gender-responsive programs for girls and is based on publications and training curriculum on gender-specific programming, including the training curriculum from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP): *Beyond Gender Barriers: Programming Specifically for Girls* (2000); OJJDP's *Guiding Principles for Promising Female Programming: An Inventory of Best Practices* (1998); and, Oregon's publication titled: *How to Implement Oregon's Guidelines for Effective Gender-Responsive Programming for Girls* (2001).

### Safe space

One of the most important aspects of gender-responsive programming for girls is the need for safe space; that is, programs should be physically, emotionally, and sexually safe. To help girls feel safe, policies that protect them from sexual harassment or other inappropriate behaviors by staff or other clients should be developed and actively enforced. Such policies should be discussed openly to ensure that girls, other clients, and staff understand what behaviors are appropriate. Space should also be provided that ensures girls' privacy during certain activities such as showering and intake screening. Identifying meeting locations that are

away from the distractions of other groups, such as boys and girls not participating in the program, is another way program administrators can help girls feel safe. Administrators of co-ed facilities should also consider creating meeting locations that are for girls only. Many girls have learned to focus their attention on pleasing adolescent males. By giving girls their own space, they are able to focus on their own needs and not the needs of others.

Girls should feel safe to learn about themselves emotionally, sexually, and intellectually. They should be able to express their feelings, perceptions, and ideas without fear of judgment by others. Program staff need to identify and understand their own biases and how these may influence their reactions to girls' opinions, ideas, or lifestyles. Additionally, girls should

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be told that it is unacceptable to use physical violence *or* covert behaviors to hurt others. Although girls may be less likely than boys to use physical aggression, studies have highlighted ways in which girls use more covert behaviors, such as gossip, teasing, and calling names to control or hurt others (Tanenbaum, 2000). Girls that use covert ways to hurt others can undermine staff attempts at developing trust. Staff should be aware of the different ways girls can hurt each other and programs should develop policies that efficiently and effectively deal with situations when girls overtly

*and* covertly hurt others.

### Holistic programming

In addition to providing safe space, gender-responsive programs for girls should be holistic. Program staff should understand the contexts surrounding girls' lives. This involves identifying and understanding how girls' relationships, their involvement in multiple systems (e.g., child welfare, juvenile justice system) and society in general has influenced their lives. Program staff should also recognize that each girl is different and that girls' cultural, religious, sexual preferences, and racial/ethnic characteristics are important to their identities. Additionally, program administrators should also consider implementing

health-based programming that teaches girls issues related to female development and physical, emotional, and mental health.

Programs should also be strengths-based; that is, programming should incorporate and build upon girls' existing personal and cultural strengths. This may include taking behaviors that have previously been labeled negative (e.g., talking too much) and identifying the positive aspects of these behaviors (e.g., good communicator).

Program administrators and staff should also understand girls' needs for relationships. Studies of female adolescent development have found that females often describe themselves in terms of their relationships with others (Gilligan et al., 1990). Program staff should teach girls what healthy relationships look like and the skills girls need to leave unhealthy relationships. Staff should be encouraged to develop trusting, yet appropriate, relationships. Girls should also be encouraged to maintain or develop positive relationships with other women in their lives (e.g., aunts, teachers).

#### *Listening to girls*

Program administrators can offer girls holistic programming and safe space, but if program staff are not actively listening they may miss important insights into why girls behave in certain ways or what services may better help them. Listening to girls entails not only listening to their opinions and ideas, but also paying attention to nonverbal communication. Some girls may use nonverbal communication to express their feelings. Additionally, some may overreact or react "inappropriately" to certain situations. These reactions may be linked to girls' past experiences. Therefore, program staff should not only be taught about the importance of listening to girls, but staff should be aware of girls' histories so that they may fully understand their behaviors.

Listening to girls also means including them in the development, implementation, and refinement of programs. Treatment providers should also consider including girls in the development of individual treatment or service plans. By including girls in these processes, they become empowered to take control of

### Programming recommendations

#### *Safe space*

- Programs should be physically, emotionally, and sexually safe for female clients.
- Girls should feel safe to express their ideas without fear of judgment by program staff or peers.
- Program staff should understand the ways girls hurt each other.

#### *Holistic programming*

- Programming should be strength-based, health-based and relationship-based.
- Girls' experiences and cultural backgrounds are important aspects of girls' identities.

#### *Listening to girls*

- Listening to girls' verbal and nonverbal communication can help program staff learn more about girls' lives.
- Listening to girls also entails including girls in the development, implementation and refinement of programs.

#### *Staff training and diversity*

- Staff should be trained on the needs of girls, the importance of relationships to girls and the ways in which girls can hurt each other.
- Staff should represent the diversity of the girls they serve.

#### *Collaboration and evaluation*

- Practitioners from different systems should work together to better serve girls.
- Evaluations of gender-responsive programming should include alternative outcome measures, and should include the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data.

their treatment plans and the changes the treatment is intended to produce.

#### *Staff diversity and training*

Staffing is critical to gender-responsive programming. Finding the most appropriate staff to work with girls is important because not everyone is able or willing to work with girls (Maniglia, 2002). Program administrators should develop interview questions that gather information about potential employees' willingness

and abilities to work with girls. Diversity also is important when hiring staff. Some girls may feel uncomfortable in programs where the staff is not culturally diverse. This may be particularly important for females of color who are often overrepresented in the delinquent girl populations, but underrepresented in program staff. A diverse staff may also help programs incorporate and understand the unique perspectives of different cultures, religions, sexual identities, races, and ethnicities.

As mentioned above, staff should be trained on the needs of girls and issues related to adolescent female development. This includes training on the importance of relationships to girls, the impact of victimization, and ways in which girls hurt others. Staff should be trained in how to engage girls in healthy, appropriate relationships and how to listen to others.

#### *Collaboration and evaluation*

Although every program administrator would like to provide girls with all the resources they need to succeed, the reality is most programs cannot provide everything girls need. Moreover, many girls involved in the juvenile justice system are also involved in other systems. Their involvement in multiple systems can result in fragmented or duplicated services and duplicated data collection efforts. Practitioners across different systems should work together to identify the types of services available to girls and the gaps that exist in these services. Additionally, by working together, programs that are unable to provide specific services to girls can make referrals to other programs that can. Practitioners should also work together to develop information-sharing agreements that will allow programs and practitioners to share critical information about girls.

Efforts to create gender-responsive programming for girls or collaborate to best serve girls should be evaluated. This is especially important given that, to date, few gender-responsive programs for girls have been evaluated. Although historically programs working with delinquents have focused on recidivism as a measure of a program's success, focusing solely on recidivism may cause programs to overlook positive changes in the girls they serve. Programs should

identify and measure other outcomes in girls. These may include changes in self-esteem, improved grades, and the development of healthy relationships. Programs should collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data may include anecdotal information from staff members about changes they have noticed in the girls involved in the program. Quantitative data may include the numbers of girls who reported higher self-esteem scores or improved grades. By using both qualitative and quantitative data, programs can highlight general changes in the girls they serve and specific changes in individual girls. As mentioned above, girls' opinions and suggestions regarding the program should be included in any evaluation.

#### *Summary*

Although what is known about female delinquents in Illinois is limited, national studies suggest that there has been an increase in the number of female juvenile offenders entering the juvenile justice system. Despite this increase, however, many female delinquents are underserved. The purpose of this report is to provide juvenile justice professionals and program administrators with information about female offenders and to highlight some promising approaches to gender-responsive programming for girls. Practitioners or program administrators interested in developing gender-responsive programming for girls should review those publications mentioned above and other articles for more in-depth information about gender-responsive programming for girls.

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***This article was written in collaboration with GIRLS LINK. GIRLS LINK is a voluntary collaborative body that aims to influence the development of a systemwide, gender-responsive culture that meets the needs of girls who are involved in or are at risk for becoming involved in the Cook County juvenile justice system. For more information about GIRLS LINK, please contact Ms. Earnest Jamison, project coordinator, at (312) 603-1160.***



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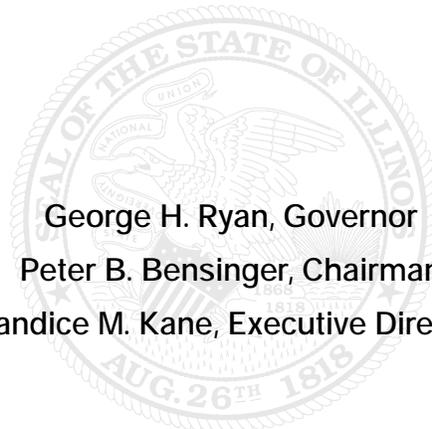
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