

# Improving Juvenile Justice for Females: A Statewide Assessment in California

**Barbara Bloom**  
**Barbara Owen**  
**Elizabeth Piper Deschenes**  
**Jill Rosenbaum**

*This article reports findings from a survey of officials from various California state agencies and a series of interviews and focus groups with female youth and professionals serving this population. The study examined types of services provided, program barriers, and facilitation of change. The findings were used to make gender-specific policy and program recommendations. The authors found that meeting the needs of girls and young women 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 and limitations. Effective programming for girls and women should be shaped by and tailored to their real-world situations and problems. In order to do this, a theoretical approach to treatment that is gender-sensitive and that addresses the realities of girls' lives must be developed.*

During the past decade, the issue of female juveniles has become a focal issue for policy makers. One reason for the increased attention may be the realization that they are one of the fastest growing segments of the juvenile justice system (Acoca, 1999). The large numbers of arrests translate into a large proportion of females in the juvenile justice system. The juvenile justice system faces a challenge with the increasing number of females, particularly with the paucity of programs designed specifically for girls.

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**BARBARA BLOOM:** Department of Criminal Justice Administration, Sonoma State University. **BARBARA OWEN:** Department of Criminology, California State University, Fresno. **ELIZABETH PIPER DESCHENES:** Department of Criminal Justice, California State University, Long Beach. **JILL ROSENBAUM:** Department of Criminal Justice, California State University, Fullerton.

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The 1992 amendments to the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act<sup>1</sup> represent the first official recognition of the issue of gender specificity in the history of federal legislation dealing with juvenile justice. These amendments required all states applying for federal formula grant dollars under Activity E of the Juvenile Challenge grant to review their services to youth and identify gaps in services to juvenile female offenders and plan for providing the needed gender-specific services for the prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency (Community Research Associates, 1998).

The current study is part of the larger needs assessment requested by the California Office of Criminal Justice Planning (OCJP). To identify gender-specific responses for at-risk girls and young women, OCJP contracted with researchers from the California State University system to develop a series of reports to address these issues, which are summarized in the final report (Owen, Bloom, Deschenes, & Rosenbaum, 1998). The researchers examined current trends in female delinquency in the state of California and reviewed federal and state policy initiatives. A comprehensive review of the theoretical and research literature included an overview of community, school, family, and individual risk and resiliency factors. In addition, they conducted a survey of officials from various state agencies and a series of interviews and focus groups with female youth and professionals serving this population. Finally, these findings were used to develop policy and program recommendations for gender-specific programs. The next section presents a brief review of the literature.

### *NATURE AND EXTENT OF FEMALE DELINQUENCY*

Recent statistics indicate a decrease in serious crime among males between the ages of 10 and 17 but show increases or smaller decreases among young females. For example, among juvenile males, the 1999 national arrest rates for the Violent Crime Index<sup>2</sup> are 7% below the 1980 rates, but rates are 74% higher than the 1980 rates among females, whose arrest rate is 122 per 100,000 persons (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention [OJJDP], 2000a, 2000b). Similarly, the arrest rate for the juvenile male Property Crime Index<sup>3</sup> declined 41% between 1980 and 1999, whereas it increased by 8% for females. Between 1993 and 1997, the greatest increases in arrests for girls were for drug abuse and crime (Snyder, 1999). 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). In 1998, females represented more than half (58%) of all juveniles arrested for running away.

The reasons for these changes in official arrests are unclear. Researchers suggest that the increases in girls' arrests for violent crime are not necessarily due to a significant rise in violent behavior but to the relabeling of girls' conflicts as violent offenses (Chesney-Lind & Okamoto, 2000). Studies using self-reported measures of delinquency show patterns that differ from the official records (Huizinga, 1997). A summary of two studies on aggression reflects that although about a third of the girls reported being in a physical fight in the past year, this was true of more than half of the boys in both samples (Girls Inc., 1996). Girls are more likely than boys to fight with a parent or sibling, whereas boys are more likely to fight with friends or strangers. 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.

For states with large juvenile populations, the raw number of arrests is staggering. In 1999 in the state of California, there were more than 60,000 arrests of female juveniles, and one sixth of these arrests (10,000) were for felony offenses (California Bureau of Criminal Statistics, 2000). Nearly 70% of the females arrested in 1999 ended up in placement or on probation.

The burden on the juvenile justice system is found both nationally and locally in terms of increases in residential placement of females in public and private facilities and increased caseloads for probation. Nationally, court orders for residential placement increased 105% between 1988 and 1997, and the number of probation cases increased 129% (Seahill, 2000). Among juveniles in confinement in 1997, the proportion of females in public facilities was less than 10%, whereas 17% were females in private facilities (Snyder & Sickmund, 2000). These rates vary by state, but most states had less than one quarter of females in residential placement. Wyoming, with 41%, had the greatest proportion of females in residential placement; nearly half of those in public facilities were female. In comparison, the rates in California are similar to the national average.

Type of confinement varies with the type of offense (Snyder & Sickmund, 2000). Females represented nearly one half of those held in confinement for status offenses (47%) but were less likely than male juvenile offenders to be placed in a residential facility for a violent index crime (13% to 27%) or property index crime (19% to 27%). Females committing a person offense were more likely to end up in public facilities (29%) than private facilities (19%).

#### *FACTORS RELATED TO FEMALE DELINQUENCY*

Growing attention is being devoted to the specific issues of female delinquency, the nature and causes of girls' involvement in crime, and the develop-

mental 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; Belknap, 2000; 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 that rates of sexual abuse are greater for girls than for boys (Dembo, Williams, & Schmeidler, 1993). In a study of girls and young women incarcerated in the California Youth Authority, Owen and Bloom (1997) found that three quarters of the young women reported ongoing physical abuse, and almost half (46%) 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 that girls are arrested more often than boys (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1992).

#### *GENDER-SPECIFIC PROGRAMS FOR GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN*

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 42% served 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 2 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 but fail to examine the difference in outcomes

based on gender. Although there are a few promising programs for girls, there is little literature on the effectiveness of various approaches (Greene, Peters, & Associates, 1998). Furthermore, 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.

### *Staff and Training*

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). One 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 et al., 1997).

Adler (1997) has noted that "willful" girls cause problems for a system that was created to handle boys and that girls are deemed to be manipulative, hysterical, and verbally aggressive, whereas 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 in the state of Hawaii underscored the need for training in areas such as gender identity and 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.

### *SYSTEM NEEDS*

To address the issue of gender-specific services for girls, the OJJDP has increased federal support to state and local agencies (Budnick & Shields-Fletcher, 1998). The experiences of several states are described in the OJJDP

publication *Female Juvenile Offenders: A Status of the States Report* (Community Research Associates, 1998). In at least one state, gender-specific programs are being developed and implemented with funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance. OJJDP has sponsored the SafeFutures demonstration for at-risk girls and female offenders. Despite the importance of these federal efforts, they remain limited in scope.

### *THE STUDY*

The current study is part of the larger needs assessment conducted for the OCJP in 1998-1999. Data collected in a statewide survey of programs for juveniles and justice system officials are used to examine questions regarding the types of services available to girls and young women in the California juvenile justice system, barriers to program services, targets for system change in services, and ways in which OCJP can facilitate change. The quantitative data are augmented with findings from the focus groups with female youth and interviews with program staff in specifically selected counties. The results suggest several avenues for modeling gender-specific policies and programs for girls and young women in the state's juvenile justice system.

#### *Survey Design*

The primary purpose of the survey was to obtain data on the types of services available to girls and young women (ages 10 to 17) in California's juvenile justice system and to learn more about problems that are faced by various providers. Two different surveys were created. A program survey was sent to all providers with programs serving juveniles to obtain information on actual services provided. Another survey was sent to representatives of juvenile justice system agencies who interact with young girls and women, including judges, detention supervisors, and chief probation officers. The program provider survey was designed to cover five content areas: program design and implementation, number of staff and clients, and needed changes. The questions were designed to measure (a) program design, such as target population, capacity, length of stay, risk factors, and issues addressed; (b) staff characteristics, including demographic characteristics and training; (c) characteristics of program clients, such as race and age by gender, presenting problems, and risk and protective factors; (d) program implementation, including intake procedure, types of services provided and services to which clients were referred outside the program, and aftercare services; and (e) program needs

and changes, such as barriers to treatment and suggestions for system change. The agency survey included some of the same measures as the program survey, such as risk and protective factors, barriers to treatment, and suggestions for system change.

### *Participants and Sampling Plan*

One of the most difficult aspects of conducting the program survey was to determine the sampling frame. To our knowledge, there was no single list that would provide the names and addresses of all the various agencies that provide delinquency prevention or intervention services to girls and young women within the state. Thus, the initial plan was to identify program providers based on information supplied by the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Councils in each of the 58 counties.<sup>4</sup> The mailing list maintained by the OCJP was the second source of information. This list contains the names of various agencies providing services for male and female juvenile delinquents that receive solicitations or funding from OCJP. The principal investigators and other experts who are familiar with many of the programs that serve adolescent females in the state of California added additional names of agencies. These three sources of information were combined, and the result was a list of 387 different program providers, both within and outside California.<sup>5</sup>

Several different sources were used to obtain the target population for the agency survey. Names of detention supervisors were obtained through the Directory of California Justice Agencies (LawTech, 1998), and the chief probation officers in each county were identified based on a contact list maintained by the California Board of Corrections. The list of juvenile court judges, referees, and commissioners in the state of California was obtained from the California Judicial Council.

### *Survey Administration and Response Rates*

Due to the large geographical area covered by the state of California and the 18-month time frame in which to conduct the study, it was decided that the best strategy was to conduct cross-sectional mail surveys. One follow-up was conducted via telephone or fax approximately 1 month following the initial mail out. For the program survey, the response rate was low, with only 67 providers completing the survey. Another 46 providers stated they did not have gender-specific programs for females. No response was received from 260 program providers, and 15 surveys were returned to sender due to incorrect addresses. The 62 respondents to the program survey used in the analysis represent only half of the 58 counties in the state.<sup>6</sup>

The agency survey was sent to 54 detention supervisors and 58 chief probation officers located in each of the 58 counties in California. Second requests for completion of the survey were completed via telephone and fax. Response rates from the various counties were reasonable, with a total of 22 detention supervisors and 41 chief probation officers responding (38% and 71%, respectively). Surveys were mailed to 196 judges, referees, and commissioners in juvenile courts in California. A total of 34 judges (17%) responded to the survey. Despite the fact that the response rate was lower than expected,<sup>7</sup> the surveys present important initial information regarding services for young women and girls in the state of California, which is not available elsewhere. Overall, there was at least one survey from 53 out of the 58 counties. Thus, when combined, the survey responses provide an adequate representation of all the counties. The findings offer important information that should be relevant to policy makers.

### *Interviews and Focus Groups*

Project staff conducted group interviews with a wide range of individuals, including probation officers, program staff, girls, and young women. These interviews were conducted in 10 counties that were representative of geography, urban or rural characteristics, or program reputation or interest. Each group interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Project staff began each session with a set of questions appropriate to the group. In some cases, the interview schedule was followed closely; in others, new and equally important discussion topics emerged during the focus group. Program and policy issues, rather than individual experiences, were emphasized in both the staff group interviews and the female youth focus groups. In general, the questions addressed the following areas: factors contributing to delinquency and other risk behavior, types of problems experienced by girls and young women, types of help and services needed, obstacles in seeking help, program gaps and barriers, and effective program elements.

### *Study Findings*

The study findings are divided into four sections, which combine the responses of the program provider and agency surveys along with the focus group or interview findings. The first section describes the types of programs available to girls and young women in the state of California. Responses of staff and female clients regarding program services are examined in addition to the survey responses. The next three sections look at barriers to program

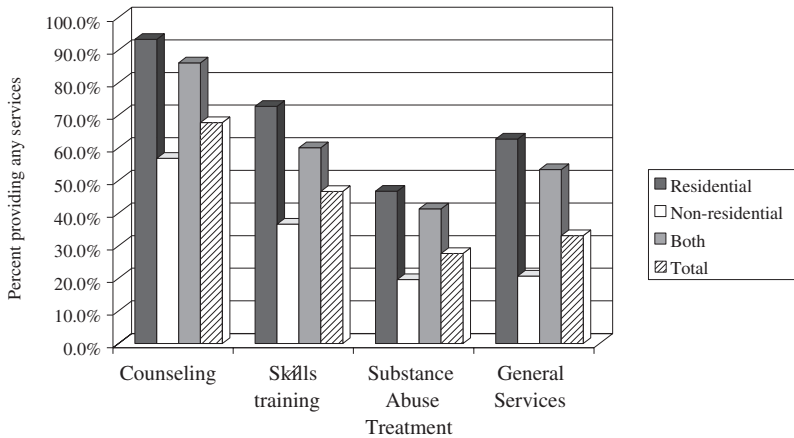
services, the targets for system change in services, and ways in which OCJP can facilitate change.

#### TYPES OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES PROVIDED TO FEMALES

Of the 62 programs represented in the surveys, the most common program type was a delinquency prevention program, followed by group treatment homes and counseling centers.<sup>8</sup> The majority of programs (77%) were coed. The average number of female clients ranged from 12 in residential programs to 148 in nonresidential, with the overall average at 99. There were slightly more male clients on average in residential programs and fewer in nonresidential, and overall, there were 72 male clients on average. Clients ranged in age from 10 to 17, with an average age of 14. The majority of clients were Hispanic, followed by Caucasian and African American. Among program providers surveyed, the average number of full-time staff was 13; most were Caucasian, and few were African American, Hispanic, or Asian. Staff were more likely to be female than male and had a high school or college degree. The majority of staff had training in childhood sex abuse, domestic violence, emotional abuse or trauma, and rape crisis intervention. Most respondents agreed that their program would benefit by having staff who are certified counselors as well as having staff who are program graduates but did not necessarily believe that staff must have a professional degree.

Few of the programs were identified as residential only ( $n = 7$ ); 39 indicated they were nonresidential or outpatient programs; another 16 programs indicated they provided both residential and nonresidential services. Almost half of the programs indicated that the program length was variable. The majority of programs reported they conduct psychosocial assessments of clients; few had child care services or offered residential treatment for mothers and dependents, but the majority did accept pregnant females, and almost half provided parenting classes.

The majority of programs reported they provide counseling and skills training as well as other general services, but less than two thirds of programs reported providing substance abuse treatment for female clients (see Figure 1).<sup>9</sup> In general, more services were provided in a residential setting than a nonresidential setting. There is some variation in the types of services provided by the type of program (see Table 1). Most programs reported that they provide individual and family counseling as well as peer groups, and more than three quarters of the programs reported they provided single-sex counseling groups. Two thirds of the programs indicated they provided educational or tutoring skills, yet only about 30% provided any vocational training.



**Figure 1: Type of Services Provided by Program Type**

The majority of programs had life skills, anger management, and parenting skills. Two thirds of the programs address substance abuse issues, but less than one third had a 12-step group; most provide individual counseling. Other than recreational activities, the majority of programs do not offer other general services except for transportation.

Responses of program staff and clients in the group interviews provide further context on the types of services that are provided. Most program and agency staff stated that “the system is designed for boys, and girls are only an afterthought.” The small numbers of females (proportionately to the males) caused difficulties in developing programs. Many staff felt that girls and young women are treated differently than are boys in the juvenile justice system and therefore are lagging way behind males in terms of programs. Some staff suggested that there is a perception that there is no problem because female youth are invisible in the juvenile justice system. Claims of a sexist system were occasionally made. Other respondents noted that the limits on program availability severely compromised the ability to provide a continuum of care for young females.

Almost all teen groups interviewed agreed that “no one ever asks us what we want,” either in terms of individual placement or program development. Overall, the group felt that their opinions and individuality were “not respected,” especially by juvenile justice officials. Staff felt strongly that girls and young women required services and programs targeted to their specific needs. These needs include more intense and one-on-one relationships

**TABLE 1: Any Services and Type of Services Provided for Female Clients by Program Type**

	<i>Type of Program</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>Residential</i>	<i>Non-residential</i>	<i>Both</i>	
<i>n</i>	7	39	16	62
Counseling*	100.0	79.5	93.7	85.5
Family	100.0	68.8	87.5	78.2
Individual	100.0	82.4	93.3	87.5
Peer support group (coed)	100.0	65.4	85.7	76.1
Peer support group (single sex)	100.0	76.7	85.7	82.4
Skills training*	100.0	82.1	93.7	87.1
Education/tutoring*	100.0	56.3	68.8	65.5
Graduate equivalency diploma*	85.7	4.0	43.8	29.2
Vocational*	100.0	8.3	33.3	30.4
Victim awareness*	100.0	38.5	61.5	53.3
Life skills	100.0	69.0	86.7	78.4
Anger management	100.0	67.7	80.0	75.5
Grief management	58.7	59.3	35.7	56.3
Parenting skills (clients)	66.7	77.8	53.3	68.9
Parenting skills (family)	83.3	71.9	50.0	67.3
Family planning (sex education)	85.7	53.6	56.3	58.8
Substance abuse treatment*	100.0	48.7	68.7	59.7
12-step groups	33.3	20.0	37.5	27.7
Group counseling (coed)	80.0	58.3	61.5	61.9
Group counseling (single sex)	75.0	61.5	61.5	62.8
Individual counseling	80.0	65.5	85.7	72.9
Sober living home*	75.0	5.6	3.3	23.5
Residential/inpatient	75.0	4.5	26.7	19.5
Detoxification	0.0	0.0	14.3	5.1
General services*	100.0	79.5	93.7	85.5
Temporary shelter	0.0	8.0	66.7	25.0
Food/clothing	100.0	25.0	93.8	56.9
Housing*	100.0	8.0	62.5	39.6
Transportation	100.0	35.7	80.0	58.0
Child care	33.3	24.0	23.1	24.4
Recreational activities*	100.0	56.3	68.8	65.5
Foster care*	83.3	8.7	41.7	29.3
Medical/dental care*	85.7	3.8	31.3	24.5
Independent living*	83.3	13.0	33.3	29.3
Mentoring	100.0	65.6	63.6	68.3

\*Significant difference between groups at  $p \leq .05$  level using chi-square tests.

with staff, more focused staff training, and emotional support and attention to the range of issues that bring this female population into the juvenile justice system.

## BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS FOR FEMALE DELINQUENTS

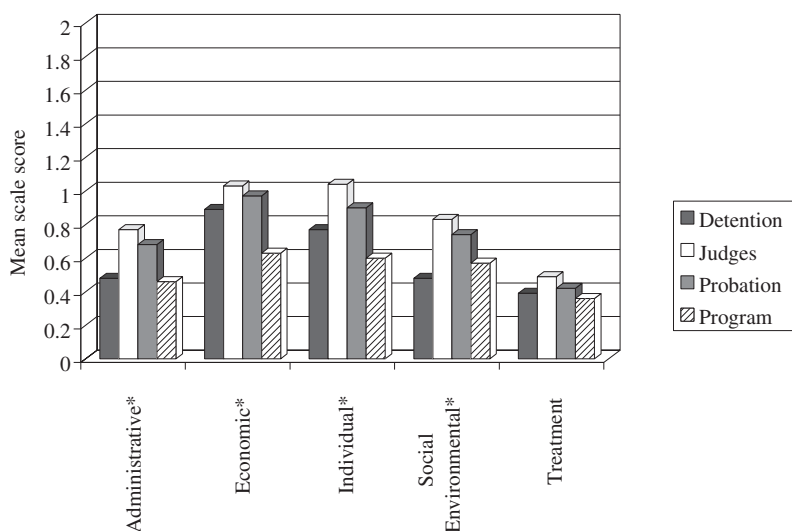
Survey respondents were asked to rate whether different types of barriers were “not a problem,” “somewhat a problem,” or “a serious problem” for girls and young women in their program or agency. The different types of barriers were divided into five domains: administrative, social environment, economic, treatment, and individual. The responses were scored on a scale from 0 (*not a problem*) to 2 (*a serious problem*), and the average was taken across respondents for each question and domain.

There were significant differences by type of respondent in terms of the perceived seriousness of types of barriers to services in four out of the five areas (see Figure 2).<sup>10</sup> In general, the responses of the judges appeared to differ from the other groups on many questions, but in some cases, the program providers differed from all the other groups. The most serious type of barrier noted by the majority of all four groups was economic, for example, funding or resources, with a rating of .85 overall in comparison to .80 for individual barriers, .67 for social environmental barriers, .59 for administrative barriers, and .41 for barriers to treatment. Within each of the categories, respondents identified different problems (see Table 2). Across all types of barriers, those issues identified as somewhat a problem or a serious problem by a majority of respondents included funding and resources, educational barriers, employment, program costs, individual acceptance of rules and regulations, family resistance, the lure of the streets, individual motivation, peer resistance, having a support system, and mental health issues.

The seriousness of administrative barriers was rated higher among judges (an average of .77) than program administrators or detention chiefs (.46% and .48%, respectively). Judges perceived access to various programs, funding or resources, and staffing as more serious problems than did the other respondents. On the other hand, geographic location was rated least serious by program administrators and more serious by other groups. Judges were more likely to perceive scheduling appointment hours as a serious problem. With the exception of program administrators, more than half of respondents in all other groups rated funding as the most serious administrative barrier.

Program providers rated economic barriers as less serious a problem than any other group. Within each category of economic barriers, there were differences by respondent group. More judges and detention chiefs perceived education as a serious barrier (47% and 50%) than other groups. Probation chiefs were more likely than other groups to rate employment as a barrier. Just less than half of judges and chief probation officers rated program cost a serious problem.

These opinions were confirmed during the group interviews with staff members in public agencies and community-based organizations who agreed



**Figure 2: Seriousness of Barriers by Type of Respondent**

\*Statistically significant difference between groups at  $p \leq .05$  using *F*-test with analysis of variance.

that funding of female-focused programs was virtually nonexistent. Very often, funding criteria do not mesh with the gender-specific needs of this population or the specific needs of a community. In applying for these funds, programs try to bend their services to match funding opportunities. As one program provider stated, "Funders sometimes do not seem to understand either how a program really works or how the funding is used." The lack of fit between funding structures and the real needs of female youth was mentioned.

Individual barriers, including individuals' motivation, acceptance of program rules and regulations, cultural issues, and peer resistance, were rated as more serious by judges than other respondents. In comparison, the program administrators were less likely to perceive these barriers as a problem. For example, 40% of administrators did not view acceptance of rules and regulations to be a problem, and less than 10% rated this as a serious problem.

In focus groups with program staff, family resistance was identified as a problem. Staff indicated that some parents are reluctant to take responsibility for their children and are resistant to interventions by social service and probation agencies. The view that "parents have given up on their children" was also expressed. Many staff observed that some parents did not want family intervention and resisted any attempt to provide help. Part of this resistance,

**TABLE 2: Average Seriousness of Barriers and Percentage Responding Serious Problem by Type of Respondent**

	<i>Respondent Type</i>				<i>Overall</i>
	<i>Program</i>	<i>Judges</i>	<i>Detention</i>	<i>Probation</i>	
<i>N</i>	61	34	24	47	166
<b>Administrative barriers</b>					
Average severity**	.46	.77	.48	.68	.59
Access/waiting list *	6.8	38.2	18.2	25.6	20.3
Funding/resources*	40.0	75.8	63.6	65.9	57.9
Geographic location *	8.8	20.6	9.1	26.7	16.5
Scheduling hours*	0.0	9.1	0.0	9.3	4.5
Staffing*	14.3	32.4	9.1	29.5	21.8
Transportation	25.4	23.5	9.1	29.5	23.9
<b>Economic barriers</b>					
Average severity**	.63	1.03	.89	.97	.85
Education*	30.2	47.1	50.0	37.8	39.0
Employment*	22.6	35.3	50.0	60.0	40.3
Program cost*	17.9	45.5	33.3	44.2	33.3
<b>Individual barriers</b>					
Average severity**	.60	1.04	.77	.90	.80
Acceptance of program rules and regulations*	8.8	50.0	18.2	22.7	22.9
Cultural*	5.2	24.2		15.9	11.5
Family resistance	20.0	23.5	22.7	27.3	23.1
Gender bias*	5.2	12.1		20.9	10.3
Language*	6.8	18.2		4.7	7.6
Lack of information*	8.9	45.5	9.5	23.3	20.9
Lure of the streets*	25.9	58.8	57.1	28.9	38.3
Motivation*	14.3	64.7	36.4	31.8	33.3
Peer resistance*	12.7	46.9	27.3	43.2	30.7
Sexual orientation*	1.7	12.1	4.8	4.7	5.2
Support system	35.1	57.6	40.9	46.7	43.9
<b>Social Environmental</b>					
Average severity**	.57	.83	.48	.74	.67
Childcare	30.8	30.3	4.8	23.3	24.8
Housing	16.7	29.4	14.3	18.2	19.6
Shelter	18.5	23.5	4.8	20.9	18.4
<b>Treatment barriers</b>					
Average severity	.36	.49	.39	.42	.41
Disability	5.8	6.3	4.8	7.0	6.1
Medical issues*	7.3	12.5	19.0	14.0	11.9
Mental health issues	21.8	47.1	36.4	31.8	32.3

NOTE: Severity rated on a scale of 0 (*not a problem*), 1 (*somewhat a problem*), or 2 (*a serious problem*).

\*Significant difference between groups at  $p \leq .05$  level using chi-square tests of association.

\*\*Statistically significant difference between groups at  $p \leq .05$  using *F*-tests with analysis of variance.

some suggested, derives from viewing “the kid as the problem” and denying the family’s role in problem behavior.

There was no statistically significant difference among survey respondents in the rating of the seriousness of treatment barriers, yet ratings of the individual types of treatment barriers did vary by respondent. For example, medical and mental health issues were rated as more serious problems by the judges in comparison to the other respondents. One respondent stated that one of the largest barriers for female services is that “professionals in the criminal justice system are not prioritizing young women as needing intensive interventions.”

Throughout the state, agency and program focus groups agreed that specific program barriers and obstacles prohibited girls and young women from accessing the few existing services. Long waiting lists for existing programs, limited out-of-home placements, and large probation caseloads were cited as examples. Others suggested that although specific “modalities” are available to boys, only “generic” services are available to girls, which inhibits appropriate placements. Several groups indicated that space was a problem. In one county, alternative programs are threatened by space needs of custody programs. Often, the demand for bed space for male programs may overshadow female program needs. Others indicated that 1-year pilot programs were short lived and disappeared even when demonstrating their utility.

In addition to these barriers and obstacles created by program limitations, the focus groups also discussed personal or internal deterrents to seeking services. Even when programs and services are available, girls and young women may be reluctant to seek such services due to the following factors: distrust and fear of persons in positions of authority, lack of knowledge about services, teen attitudes and resistance, lack of personal contact with staff, lack of services accessibility and transportation, domestic responsibility, and cultural and immigration issues.

#### SUGGESTED PROGRAM CHANGES

When asked to indicate what type of changes would help improve services for girls and young women in their program or agency, survey respondents noted many targets for system change in services for females (see Figure 3).<sup>11</sup> The majority (72%) suggested that they need “improved or more information about what works for girls and young women.” This response was significantly higher among judges than other groups. More than half of respondents indicated that additional resources were needed, and about one third suggested there should be some reallocation of resources. Judges, in particular, were more likely than other groups to see this as an area to be changed. Pro-

gram administrators were least likely (15%) to indicate a need to modify service delivery models, but about half of all other respondents suggested that changes needed to be made in this area. Judges were more likely than other types of respondents to indicate there should be changes in terms of bureaucratic or administrative red tape (44%).

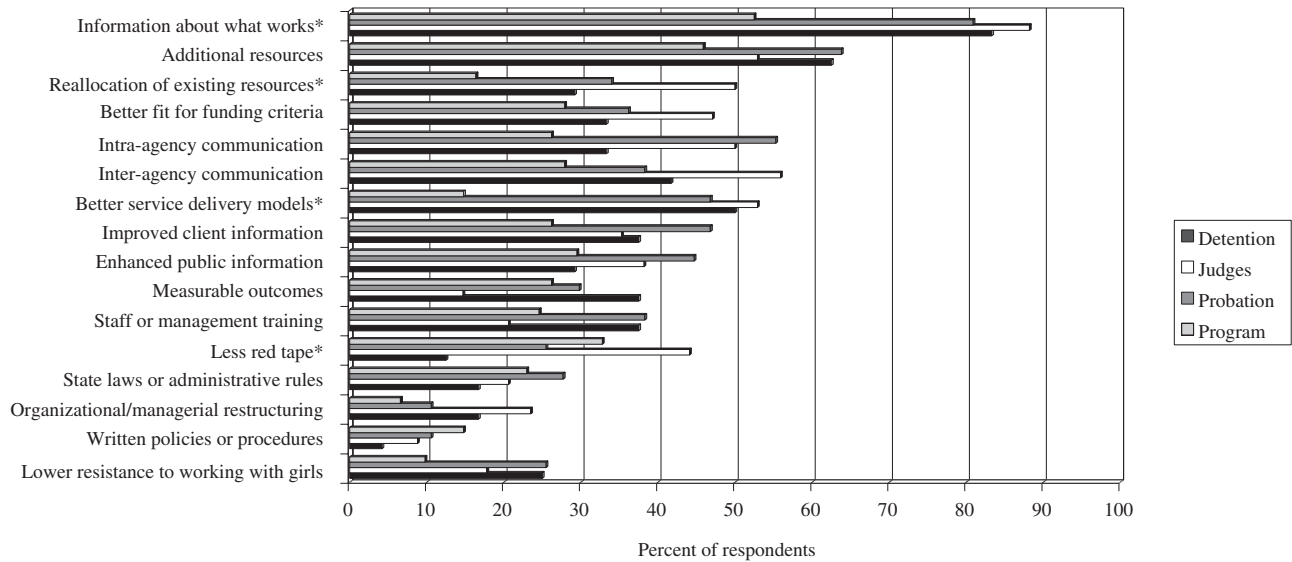
Survey respondents indicated more information is needed about what works for girls and the need to identify the best practices for female delinquents. Similarly, the vast majority of the staff participating in the focus groups agreed that the juvenile justice system is not equipped to address the multiple problems of girls and young women. They felt that the juvenile justice system lacks program capacity, graduated sanctions, and specific services for girls and young women. Other identified needs included specialized training and mentoring programs.

These opinions were supported in the focus groups with program staff. Probation staff and others involved with the juvenile justice system pointed out the enormous overlap between the work of social service agencies and their own. Many expressed frustration in gaining cooperation, particularly when attempting to deliver family-based services. Problems in collaboration include case planning and management, information sharing, and responsibility sharing. Many probation officers felt that once a youth was placed on probation, social services no longer provided any services to the youth or family. Many probation officers claimed that social services “treats probation like a dumping ground” in this respect.<sup>12</sup>

The role of the schools was a subject of much debate among the staff in the group interviews. School was viewed as the ideal place for expanded prevention and intervention services, but the difficulty of this approach was acknowledged. One probation officer indicated that schools have difficulty in managing the disruptive student and often turn to the probation department to handle this problem:

The schools do not want to deal with a kid on probation. They are afraid to be an authority figure and want to kick the kid out or turn them over to us. When a kid is on probation, the school wants him or her to go to Court School. It becomes a dumping ground for the kids nobody wants. The teachers need to have more discipline in the classroom. Now they just wait to turn the kid over to us. The school is not prepared to deal with the noncompliant kid. These become throw-away kids, and no one wants to deal with them anymore.

Focus group participants had many suggestions concerning the elements of effective programs. Most participants felt that programs must be designed specifically to address the wide range of problems, issues, and needs girls and young women presented to the system. These designs should be based on



**Figure 3: Suggested Program Changes by Type of Respondent**

\*Statistically significant difference between groups at  $p \leq .05$  using  $F$ -tests with analysis of variance.

**TABLE 3: Suggestions for Program Change by Respondent Type (in percentages)**

	<i>Respondent Type</i>				<i>Overall</i>
	<i>Program</i>	<i>Judges</i>	<i>Detention</i>	<i>Probation</i>	
Improved or more information about what works for girls*	52.5	88.2	83.3	80.9	72.3
Additional resources	45.9	52.9	62.5	63.8	54.8
Reallocation of existing resources*	16.4	50.0	29.2	34.0	30.1
Better fit between funding criteria and characteristics of females	27.9	47.1	33.3	36.2	34.9
Improved intra-agency communication/collaboration*	26.2	50.0	33.3	55.3	40.4
Improved interagency communication/collaboration	27.9	55.9	41.7	38.3	38.6
Modified or new service delivery models*	14.8	52.9	50.0	46.8	36.7
Improved client information systems	26.2	35.3	37.5	46.8	35.5
Enhanced public information efforts	29.5	38.2	29.2	44.7	35.5
Improved or more clarification of measurable outcomes	26.2	14.7	37.5	29.8	26.5
Improved/different opportunities for staff or management training	24.6	20.6	37.5	38.3	29.5
Less bureaucratic and/or administrative red tape *	32.8	44.1	12.5	25.5	30.1
Changes in state laws or administrative rules	23.0	20.6	16.7	27.7	22.9
Organizational or managerial restructuring	6.6	23.5	16.7	10.6	12.7
Written policies or procedures	14.8	8.8	4.2	10.6	10.8
Lowered resistance to working with girls	9.8	17.8	25.0	25.5	18.1

\*Significant difference between groups at  $p \leq .05$  level using one-way analysis of variance  $F$ -tests or chi-square tests.

gender-specific models that address a continuum of care and provide comprehensive services to the female youths as well as their families. The need for aftercare, follow-up, and transitional services was also stressed. There was also a strong sense that effective programs should be grounded in strength-based models that impart the skills and knowledge necessary to overcome any damaging experiences or problems in their lives. Program providers and agency staff also suggested that models that build on and create successes in the lives of these girls and young women were also desirable.

Most program providers acknowledged the need for program evaluation, but few were satisfied with the evaluation requirements of their funding agencies. Most program providers indicated a desire to develop applied evaluation methods that would be useful in improving program effectiveness.

The lack of linkages and collaboration is another aspect of the inadequate continuum of care for young women involved in the juvenile justice system. Although some counties said they were pleased with the linkages and collaborative efforts in place, others suggested that such cooperation was a significant problem. Many probation staff felt that probation was often used as an alternative to the mental health system and the failures of the school system. Probation, they felt, was asked to deal with a large number of problems that should be handled in a collaborative manner.

#### STATE FACILITATION OF CHANGE

Survey respondents noted several ways in which state agencies can help implement or facilitate changes to services for girls and young women in the state (see Figure 4).<sup>13</sup> Almost three quarters of respondents indicated they needed program funding. A higher proportion of probation officers than other groups indicated a need for funding for program evaluation. At least half of all respondents reported a need to identify what the best practices are for females, suggesting some sort of curriculum or program development, and staff development, training, and workshops. Those surveyed responded differently when asked about program monitoring, with detention chiefs and probation officers indicating a greater need for increased funding. Enhanced public information efforts were not seen as important by detention chiefs but were perceived as important by about 40% of all other respondents.

Individual respondents noted that money was needed for training, preventive measures, aftercare, program and client monitoring, and new programs. Increased accessibility for different types of clients, which would include "transitional housing" and "alarmed facilities for high-risk runaways," was noted by many respondents. Many agencies desired increased staff training as their next objective once funding was secured. Specifically, they desired

training for the “special needs of females.” These include “gender-specific services, recreation, art, drama, music, and dance therapy.” Staff also need training in interventions, mentoring, mental health, and sexual assault. Many respondents felt training should be state funded and recognize the “need to support overtime.” They noted that “ongoing training is important for staff development.”

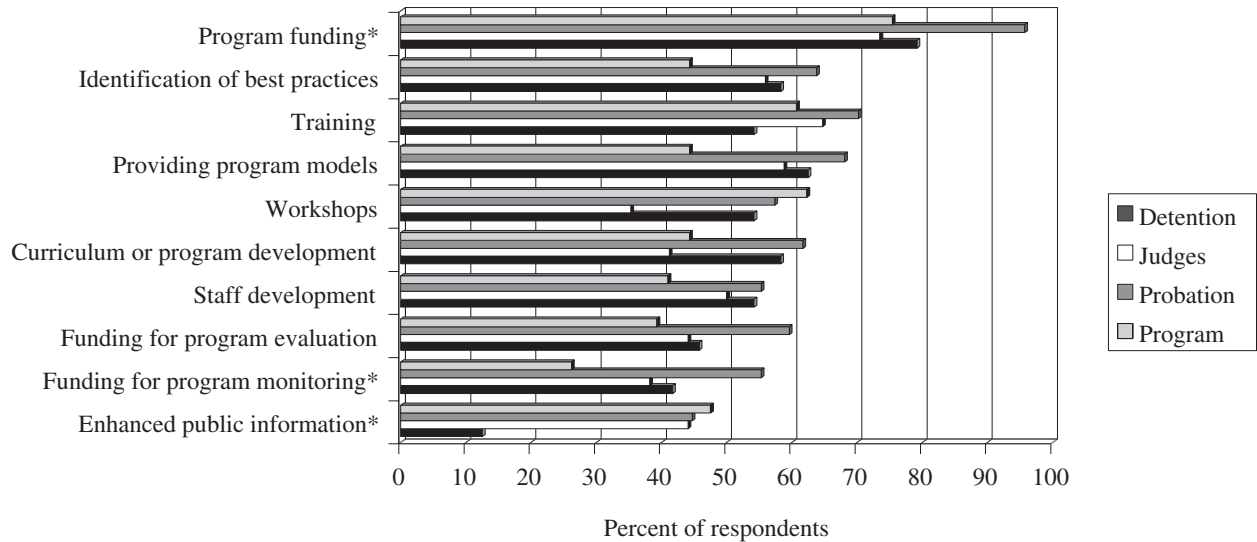
Staff in both programs and agencies remarked that working with girls and young women presents unique requirements and challenges. There was unanimous agreement that all staff needed training in dealing with girls and young women. This training must include information about the issues that bring girls and young women into the system and their specific needs that must be addressed. Training should include communication techniques and the dynamics of relationship development with this population. There was a consensus that working with female youth is more draining than working with male youth.

Staff argued that the needs of girls and young women are much different than males and that this is not taken into account in training. The issues go much deeper and require more staff knowledge, training, understanding, and time. Although everyone interviewed in this project was adamant about their commitment to working with girls and young women, individuals also spoke at length of the difficulties in working with this population. One probation officer presented a common view:

It is harder to work with girls. There are so many complicated issues when you get to know them better, and sometimes you don't want to get to know them better because you can't get in depth with them. What do you have to offer? When the girls break down in your office, you do not have much to offer them. There are few resources for girls; there are long waiting lists, and there are always funding issues. I would like to see the [probation officer] role expanded to be more of a counselor. So many times the girls will do things to get my attention. They will often violate their probation when they are near the end of their term. Or they will call me and tell me that they are not going to school. I think the girls do well with structure. They respond to structure, to consistency, and to people that care.

Many staff members suggested that building one-on-one relationships with girls and young women was a critical first step. However, these more personalized relationships also create problems in matching staff members with clients, particularly in a therapeutic environment. On the other hand, when a close relationship does develop with a staff member, girls and young women may experience problems when leaving a program.

The critical need for information about effective program elements was apparent in every county visited for focus group interviews. Program and



**Figure 4: Facilitation of Change by Type of Respondent**

\*Significant difference between groups at  $p \leq .05$  using  $F$ -tests with analysis of variance or chi-square tests.

**TABLE 4: Facilitation of Change by Respondent Type (in percentages)**

	<i>Respondent Type</i>				<i>Overall</i>
	<i>Program</i>	<i>Judges</i>	<i>Detention</i>	<i>Probation</i>	
Program funding*	75.4	73.5	79.2	95.7	81.3
Identify best practices	44.3	55.9	58.3	63.8	54.2
Training	60.7	64.7	54.2	70.2	63.3
Providing program models	44.3	58.8	62.5	68.1	56.6
Workshops	62.3	35.3	54.2	57.4	54.2
Curriculum or program development	44.3	41.2	58.3	61.7	50.6
Staff development	41.0	50.0	54.2	55.3	48.8
Funding for program evaluation	39.3	44.1	45.8	59.6	47.0
Funding for program monitoring*	26.2	38.2	41.7	55.3	39.2
Enhanced public information efforts*	47.5	44.1	12.5	44.7	41.0

\*Significant difference between groups at  $p \leq .05$  level using one way analysis of variance *F*-tests or chi-square tests.

agency staff told us that reliable information about what works for this neglected population was in demand throughout the state. We were also told that this information was often difficult to find and that there were problems in bringing these needs to the attention of decision makers. The need to develop, implement, evaluate and publicize gender-specific programs was keenly felt throughout the state.

The important role played by judges, commissioners, and referees in the juvenile justice process requires that they become more aware of the differences between young males and females and the specific needs of girls and young women. In the focus groups, it was noted that there is a need for education and training of all parties in the juvenile justice system to provide an understanding of the dynamics of female crime, particularly in terms of its changing nature, as well as the similarities and dissimilarities to male juvenile crime. There was agreement that judges, prosecutors, and public defenders did not have a clear picture about youthful female offenders and their needs. In addition, these important parties did not have a clear understanding of the available programs within the county. This education and training should include gender differences in delinquency, substance abuse education, the developmental stages of female adolescence, and available programs and appropriate placements and limitations. Representatives from

community-based organizations suggested they should focus outreach to the judicial community.

### *DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION*

A review of the relevant literature, surveys of juvenile justice agency officials and program providers, and focus group interviews with program staff and female clients reveals several areas for improving the juvenile justice system for girls and young women. The results of this statewide assessment indicated existing services do not meet the needs of female juvenile offenders. There are numerous barriers to treatment, the most important being the need for funding, followed by the lack of information. Survey and focus group respondents made several suggestions for change and indicated methods by which state agencies can facilitate change. Incorporating these suggestions into a model that provides gender-specific services for at-risk girls and young women presents a unique challenge for policy makers.

Meeting the needs of girls and young women 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 and limitations. In both programs and agencies, staff remarked that working with girls and young women presented unique requirements and challenges. There was unanimous agreement that all staff needed training in dealing with girls and young women. This training must include information about the issues that bring girls and young women into the system, their specific needs, and an awareness of communication techniques and relationship development with this population.

Program managers reported they lack information about available models and program effectiveness and see that funding for gender-appropriate programs is critically inadequate. The survey respondents stated that more information is needed on what works for girls and young women. Most agreed that the best practices for females are yet to be identified. The critical need for information about effective program elements was apparent in the 12 counties participating in the focus group interviews. Program and agency staff stated that reliable information about what works for this neglected population was in demand throughout the state. They also mentioned that this information was difficult to find and that there were problems in bringing these needs to the attention of decision makers. The need to develop, implement, evaluate, and publicize gender-specific programs was keenly felt throughout the state.

A model for gender-specific services should be responsive to the concerns of agency officials and program staff and, most important, to the needs of the clients. This study has illuminated some of the barriers to effective treatment as well as the types of changes needed to current services. We conclude with some general recommendations for designing gender-specific programs and policies for girls and young women in the juvenile justice system.

Programs and services for girls and young women need to address their specific situations as female adolescents in society. These efforts should be gender specific and gender appropriate. Girls, Inc. (1996) described gender-specific services for young women as those designed "to meet the unique needs of female offenders; that value the female perspective; that celebrate and honor the female experience; that respect and take into account female development; and empower young women to reach their full potential" (p. 24). However, Bloom (1997) noted that specific direction on how to achieve these objectives is not readily apparent from the existing literature. Effective programming for girls and women should be shaped by and tailored to their real-world situations and problems. To do this, a theoretical approach to treatment that is gender sensitive and addresses the realities of girls' lives must be developed.

A comprehensive approach should provide linkages and referrals to other community-based programs. These programs should be small and incorporate a staffing pattern that ensures the development of one-on-one relationships. They should be located in the communities where these girls and young women live. Program services must be age appropriate, recognizing the different needs within developmental stages of girlhood, adolescence, and early adulthood.

## NOTES

1. Since 1974, the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act has provided the nation with a comprehensive policy to (a) improve the juvenile justice system, (b) increase efforts to prevent and reduce delinquency, (c) increase state and local governments and public and private agencies' capacity to respond effectively, and (d) expand research, evaluation, and training efforts.

2. The Violent Crime Index includes the offenses of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Rates are arrests per 100,000 persons ages 10 to 17 in the resident population and are computed by dividing the total number of arrests by the estimated population.

3. The Property Crime Index includes the offenses of burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson.

4. As a result of State Assembly Bill 1760, each county in California was required to create a Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council that would develop a long-range plan and have limited oversight of all programs that deal with juveniles (both males and females).

5. Because there is no one source of information about the number of agencies that provide program services for juvenile offenders, it is impossible to know whether the combined list includes the majority of agencies. However, the Office of Criminal Justice Planning staff felt that the list was comprehensive. Some out-of-state programs were included because California youth are sent to those facilities.

6. Two of the surveys were incomplete and were not included. Another three surveys were deleted from the analysis because they had not been filled out appropriately. Despite the fact that follow-up mailings and phone calls were used to try and increase the response rate, these figures reflect a very low rate (only 25% when those programs that do not serve girls are excluded).

7. There are several possible reasons for this low response. One factor that may have influenced the response rate is the fact that a different group of researchers had conducted another survey in the 6 months prior to our survey. We did try to counteract the possible effects by sending a cover letter with the survey explaining that the current survey had nothing to do with the earlier survey. Another possibility is that the low response rate reflects the historical lack of concern for girls among juvenile justice practitioners. Over the years, many researchers have argued that policy makers and criminal justice personnel have overlooked the needs of female offenders (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1992; Schwartz, Steketee, & Schneider, 1990). A third reason for the low response rate may reflect the burdens put on these administrators and the amount of paperwork. There was little or no incentive to complete this rather lengthy (12-page) survey.

8. Program providers self-identified the primary categorization as any one of the following: day treatment, group treatment home, prevention, shelter, foster home, independent living, crisis center, residential placement, counseling center, probation unit, outpatient program, intensive supervision, mentoring, substance abuse, or day care.

9. The survey included a checklist of 31 services divided into the four categories. Respondents were instructed to check all that apply and indicate whether the agency provides or refers services by checking the box; some respondents checked both boxes.

10. Both crosstabulation with chi-square tests and one-way analysis of variance of differences of means or proportions were used in the analysis. Scheffé posthoc tests were conducted when the *F*-test was significant. In the text, stated differences between groups were statistically significant at the .05 level as shown by the posthoc tests.

11. For each of the 16 items included in the survey, respondents checked a box if they perceived the service was needed. Additional space was provided for an explanation or comment.

12. Probation officers in the interview sessions did not specify whether "social services" refers to the Department of Family Services or local agencies or workers.

13. Ten items were listed on the survey, and respondents could both indicate this type of change was needed and write in an explanation or comment.

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