

*ProDES*

Program Development  
and Evaluation System

*PrOMIS*

Prevention Outcome  
Monitoring Information  
System

# **A Focus on Girls in Juvenile Justice**

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***ProDES***, the Program Development and Evaluation System that tracks all court-committed Philadelphia juveniles, is operated by the Crime and Justice Research Institute. It is funded by the Department of Human Services and is a service of the Department's Division of Juvenile Justice Services. The contracted programs conduct all data collection at both intake and discharge. Follow-up data (6 months after discharge) are collected as well.

***PrOMIS***, the Prevention Outcome Monitoring Information System that tracks Philadelphia youths referred to the Department of Human Services for delinquency prevention services, is operated by the Crime and Justice Research Institute. It is funded by the Department of Human Services and is a service of the Department's Division of Juvenile Justice Services, Prevention Services Unit. The contracted prevention programs conduct all data collection at both intake and discharge. As with *ProDES*, follow-up data are collected 6 months after discharge. A Working Group comprising selected program and DHS representatives guides the *PrOMIS* project.

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***Why should we focus on girls in the juvenile justice system?***

In the past several years the juvenile justice system has been criticized for its lack of attention to girls. Juvenile corrections programs have been a particular target of critics. Proponents of programs for girls have offered several key reasons why girls should be a particular focus for juvenile corrections programs:

- Programs have traditionally been developed around the needs and problems of boys
- Programs developed for boys do not seem to work for girls
- There seem to be different pathways to delinquency for boys and girls
- The number of girls entering the juvenile justice system is growing

Much recent evaluation literature that argues that program success can be improved with the matching of individuals to programs. That is, research has shown that interaction between program characteristics (including interventions, modality, and staff characteristics) and client characteristics (risk level, responsivity type, cultural background) affect outcomes. When these findings are combined with our knowledge concerning gender and delinquency and how programs currently deal with girls, the need to reexamine services for girls is obvious.

Between the third quarter of fiscal year 1994 and the second quarter of fiscal year 2000, about 10% of the youths committed to delinquency programs were female. This figure has remained rather stable over time. The Philadelphia Department of Human Services contracts with 13 programs that provide services for delinquent girls exclusively. Some of these programs provide services exclusively developed for girls, while others serve girls in a program separate from their boys' programs. There are an additional 26 programs that service delinquent girls, but are co-educational. The remaining programs provide services to boys exclusively.

In contrast, approximately half of the cases referred for delinquency prevention services to DHS funded delinquency prevention programs are female. Of the nineteen programs serving prevention youths, two serve girls exclusively. Each of the remaining seventeen prevention programs provide services to girls, but none can be characterized as girl-focused.

Recent attention paid to girls in the juvenile justice system has resulted in a number of suggested "best practices," as well as issues to consider when intervening in the lives of girls. The following is a summary of what researchers and practitioners have identified as areas of concern.

***Issues to Consider When Serving Girls***

**1. Development**

A. Relationships

1. A focus on inter-personal relationships is important for the development of girls' identity
2. Girls define themselves through the people with whom they relate and how they get along with them
3. Girls are likely to experience diminished self-esteem and a loss of sense of self during adolescence
4. For effective development, a sense of belonging, competence and self-worth is required

B. Mental Health Issues

1. Depression

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- a. Girls are more likely to experience depression than boys
- b. Depression is a central pathway to delinquency for girls

### Why?

1. They feel indifference towards their personal safety and consequences of actions
  2. They become withdrawn, have limited interests, have low self esteem, are rejected by prosocial peers and become associated with delinquent peers
  3. Depression promotes a lack of interest and withdrawal from prosocial activities and interests
2. Eating Disorders
  3. Mental Health System:  
Behavior that in the past was likely to result in commitment to a juvenile justice program is now likely to result in a commitment to a mental health program.
- C. Early Pubertal Maturation is shown to be related to depression and antisocial behavior

## **2. Risk Factors for Delinquency**

- A. Sexual and Physical Abuse
- B. Substance Abuse
- C. Teen Pregnancy
- D. Poor academic performance
- E. Mental health problems
- F. Gang membership
- G. Early onset puberty
- H. Alternative lifestyle
- I. Pathways to Delinquency
  1. Incest → Running away → prostitution and/or drug selling
  2. Poverty, Substance abuse, domestic violence → violent street crime
  3. Familial drug use → drug use
  4. Depression → feelings of indifference → delinquency
  5. Depression → withdrawal, low self-esteem → rejection by prosocial peers → deviant peers → delinquency
  6. Depression → lack of interest and concentration → withdrawal from prosocial activities and institutions → delinquency

## **3. Protective Factors for Delinquency**

- A. Self-Confidence and self-esteem regarding gender
- B. Positive relationships
- C. Sense of individualism
- D. Orientation to the future
- E. Delaying sexual activity
- F. Strong family bonding
- G. Academic Success/progress
- H. Strengthening of racial and ethnic systems that support resiliency (e.g. family bonding, spiritual values)

## **4. Internalization of Problems**

- A. Girls are more likely to hurt themselves than others when they have a poor self image
- B. Frustration with school may result in girls “shutting down” quietly

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- C. Mental health problems, a history of victimization or post-traumatic stress disorder may lead to the internalization of problems
- D. Internalization of problems may manifest itself through drug use, eating disorders, suicide, self-mutilation (e.g. slashing wrists), or depression
- E. Even though girls may be more likely than boys to internalize problems, a subgroup of “violent” girls exists in the juvenile justice system

**5. Abuse History**

- A. Girls in the juvenile justice system are far more likely than boys to have a history of sexual or physical abuse
- B. Many girls enter the juvenile justice system as runaways because of a history of abuse at home
- C. Evidence suggests that there is a relationship between sexual/physical abuse, substance abuse, and risky behavior
- D. Sexual or physical abuse negatively affects girls’ self-image and self esteem; sexual attitudes and practices; family relationships; and vocational/educational goals and success

**6. Sexuality and Motherhood**

- A. Female offenders are more likely than non-offenders to engage in sexual activity
- B. Many girls who enter the juvenile justice system are pregnant or become pregnant after entry into the system
- C. A history of sexual abuse increases the likelihood of teen pregnancy
- D. Pregnancy and early onset puberty are risk factors for delinquency
- E. Early onset puberty is likely to result in feelings of alienation and sexual experimentation

**7. Violence and Aggression**

- A. Girls who engage in minor violence are often perceived of as more dangerous than boys
- B. Between 1985 and 1994, the proportion of girls engaging in violent crime has been increasing. However, violent crime still represents a very small proportion of the behavior of girls and the increase in violent crime represents changes in the actions of youths overall.

**8. Academic Concerns**

- A. Poor academic performance is a risk factor for delinquency
- B. Many girls enter the juvenile justice system with a history of school failure, suspensions and/or expulsions
- C. Many girls in the juvenile justice system have a negative attitude towards learning and have little self-confidence regarding learning
- D. Girls are likely to respond to academic frustration by “shutting down” (skipping school, dropping out, not participating in the classroom)
- E. Academic education/success is an effective delinquency prevention approach

**9. Gender Role Issues**

- A. Avoidance of gender bias and abuse as well sensitivity to prior victimization is critical for girls
- B. In the past, evidence suggested that the belief that girls need to be protected increased the chances of a girl being committed to an institution
- C. The development of a positive self-image through the encouragement of gender role flexibility, female role models and the promotion of equity and female leadership is important

**10. Diversity**

- A. Evidence suggests that ethnic minorities have received more severe dispositions than non-minority girls
- B. Lesbian girls may feel ostracized, putting them at risk for substance abuse and suicide
- C. Recognizing cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious differences is important for delinquency prevention

***Program Design***

While no one program will work for every girl, there are a number of program design issues that many consider important when developing programs for girls. Furthermore, while girls have problems that boys do not have, similarities do exist. The following table suggests program components that may be useful in addressing issues of particular concern to girls. In addition, in the column marked “Measured,” it notes whether *ProDES* or *PrOMIS* collect data on a particular component.

Program Design		
Issue	Component	Measured
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on building relationships with staff</li> <li>• Development of positive peer relationships w/discussion groups of adolescent females</li> <li>• Help girls link professional and emotional success with strong relationships</li> <li>• Help girls restore relationships with others</li> <li>• Concentrate on violation of relationships rather than rule violation</li> </ul>	<p>1</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>
Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Screen for emotional or behavioral disorders (especially if there is a history of abuse)</li> <li>• Arts-based program to deal with passivity or internalization of problems (e.g. dance, drama)</li> </ul>	<p>√</p> <p>√</p>
Maturation/ Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Girls need to have an understanding of female development (physical, sexuality)</li> <li>• Girls who have matured early may need discussions re: development to deal w/ alienation</li> <li>• Sense of belonging, competency, trust, love, respect from adults to foster maturation</li> <li>• Need to separate from parents to mature</li> <li>• Problem solving skills to develop confidence, teach girls to make effective &amp; healthy decisions (e.g. community based or group activities)</li> </ul>	<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>
Academic/ Vocational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Screen for academic problems &amp; learning disabilities (include girl's assessment of strengths, weaknesses &amp; interests)</li> <li>• Check school records</li> <li>• Identify girl's learning style</li> <li>• Cooperative learning environments promote relationships</li> <li>• Focus on women's history as well as multi-cultural history</li> <li>• Academic education: GED, high school diploma, career development, ESL, vocational training</li> <li>• Vocational/work programs that offer traditional and non-traditional occupations for females</li> </ul>	<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>
Non-Academic Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life Skills-connections to real world experiences, promotion of economic self-sufficiency</li> <li>• Physical Training- to develop physical strength as well as ability to reach goals</li> <li>• Self-defense-recognition of dangerous situations</li> <li>• Self-Esteem and Empowerment Training- develop leadership skills and sense of self-value</li> <li>• Multiple types of programs for discovery of talents &amp; abilities (e.g. arts, sports, as well as academic &amp; vocational options)</li> </ul>	<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>
Gender Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide girls with female role models</li> <li>• Promote gender flexibility as well as equity and leadership</li> <li>• Group counseling to aid institutional adjustment or focus on female specific problems (e.g. sexual abuse)</li> <li>• Provide assertiveness training to counter passivity or teach girls how to set limits in relationships</li> </ul>	<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>
Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff should be aware of differences across cultures in areas such as communication styles, interpersonal relationships etc. that may impact service delivery or treatment needs</li> <li>• Activities honoring cultural diversity and promoting respect of different cultures</li> </ul>	<p>√</p>
Abuse History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach girls to be survivors, not simply victims</li> <li>• Therapy- Be cautious about trying to maintain/restore the family unit when there is a history of familial physical or sexual abuse</li> </ul>	<p>√</p> <p>√</p>
Sexuality and Motherhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach girls that they have choices regarding sexuality exploration and power re: relationships</li> <li>• Access to OB/GYN and prenatal services</li> </ul>	<p>√</p> <p>√</p>
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental training</li> <li>• Parent discussion groups- give parents chances to talk to other parents about mutual concerns</li> <li>• Home visits to foster communication, allow staff to make family assessments</li> <li>• Focus on communication</li> </ul>	<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>

<sup>1</sup> Under development

Other program design concerns:

- Other program components:
  - Spirituality—religious and/or non-religious outlets for exploring who they are
  - Recreation to provide activities as alternatives to delinquent behavior
  
- Tailoring the program:
  - Individualized planning for high-risk youths (e.g. violent female juvenile offenders)
  - Continual assessments of girls' needs, strengths, and issues
  - Involvement of girls in treatment/service decisions
  
- Program Organization and Management:
  - A structured/focused program is important
  - Staff characteristics:
    - Use of female staff as means to promote safety and comfort
    - Ethnically diverse staff to provide role models
  - Staff cooperation/teamwork approach to enforce notion of adult cooperation
  - Case management style to connect girls to a mentor
  - Staff training regarding gender-specific programming
  - Aftercare or community reintegration

### ***Conclusion***

While the information we have on the appropriate ways to service girls in the juvenile justice system is growing, we still have much to learn. The most suitable use of this report is as a foundation for program development. The practices suggested here can be evaluated by *ProDES* and *PrOMIS* to help determine how they fare in the context of the Philadelphia population.

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